

Two-time Hugo Award Nominee

ABORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION

Tales of the Human Kind

July-August 1989 / \$3.00

The District Domino Championship

Soviet Humor

By Kir Bulychev

Bluebonnets

By Patricia Anthony

Quantum Dots

A New Science Column

By Robert A. Metzger



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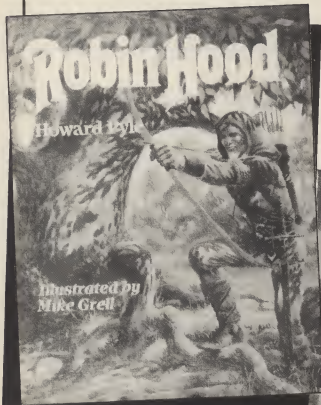
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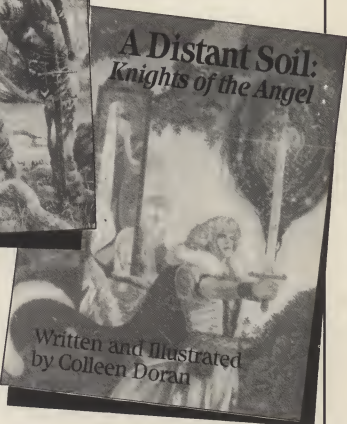
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WRITE FOR YOUR FREE STARBLAZE NEWSLETTER

Bluebonnets

By Patricia Anthony

Art by Lucy Synk

Walking up the steps, she automatically straightens her dress. It's habit with her now, after having been trained for years by the electric-shock therapy of her mother's words.

On the way to church, Mama finally looks down, down, and down, like those cartoons where the person seems big as a mountain. She doesn't really speak like a mountain, though. A mountain should boom. Mama hisses. Don't you have a comb in your purse? Your hair's all falling in your face. And, God, didn't you iron that dress?

She pauses to check her hem in the glass doors as they open. Mr. Parks, the only human in the lobby, breaks off a list of instructions to a bot as soon as she walks in. The smile on his face is of a sort that should be legal only on morticians.

"Ms. Jouette?" His eyes are the gray hue of mold on spoiled food. His gaze lowers to her hands.

She looks down to see smears of the paint she had been using that morning: a poisonous yellow, a vicious blue.

The handkerchief comes out. Mama spits on it. The spit is slimy and doesn't feel like water at all. Can't you keep yourself clean for even a few minutes? Didn't you wash your face this morning when you got up? The cotton hankie, rubbed hard, is as hurtful as sandpaper. When it's pulled away, she looks in the tiny compact mirror Mama has thrust into her hands and sees the red smudges like bruises where Mama has scrubbed.

"Will they take her?" Mr. Parks asks. Even his voice is unctuous. If she were to spend the night with him, she would wake up, she imagines, to find oil smudges on the sheets. He would make love with the slick, uncompromising rhythm of a piston.

"No."

His head nods on its greased hinge. "I assume they'll take you. It would be quite a coup for them, actually."

"There's no reason for me to go, now."

For a moment his gaze rests on her face. There is a bitter envy there that makes him seem more real, less of a meaty machine. "It's for the best, I suppose. You're not the type."

She feels the sting and lashes back. She's learned to protect herself from everyone but her mother. "Well, Mr. Parks. What type do you assume to be the right one?"

When a knife tip is pressed against flesh, the flesh

dimples in. The skin stretches to its breaking point. There was something of that frantic yielding in Mr. Parks's eyes. "The pioneer woman. You know. Hard-bitten, rough." He changes subjects as if her cowardice and softness are no more remarkable than her hair color. "Your mother had a bad day today."

All Mama's days are bad, she thinks.

"The Synadase is no longer working."

A bot chair brings a toothless old man into the room. The chair and the old man are having an argument about a patch of liquid sunlight in the atrium. The old man wants to sit in it. The chair is patiently explaining the dangers of ultraviolet radiation.

"Ms. Jouette?"

"I heard you."

"You've done everything you can do. You can at least feel good about that."

"I can feel good about trying to get my mother to a place where they would let her live. Now I can feel good about telling you to kill her." She is still looking at the old man and the chair. The chair is winning the argument by cheating. It simply refuses to move forward, and the old man is apparently too feeble to walk. He bangs with futile anger on the padded arm-rests.

"Most of our families are not so insistent. They realize that what's done is a blessing."

"A blessing for whom?"

Mr. Parks doesn't answer.

She turns to see him looking at the little square of incandescent sunlight that dominates the atrium like a visit from God. There is a shocking sort of longing in Mr. Parks's face.

"A blessing for whom?"

Mr. Parks's tongue darts out to lick his lips, leaving no wetness behind, as if he had no moisture in him. "None of our families has fought as hard as you. You must love your mother very much."

It surprises her that Mr. Parks has not understood. If he understood he would speak of guilt. He would speak of anger.

"Loving someone," Parks says, "means letting them go."

Yes, she thinks. *But then I'm not certain I love Mama. I need her to live long enough so that I can decide.*

"A bot will take you," he says.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

By Charles C. Ryan

Lepton Power II

It was a breakthrough that could change the face of the planet and the quality of life for all of its inhabitants — but the story did not make the front page of the *Boston Globe*.

It's not surprising. The breakthrough, after all, wasn't made by a big, glamorous research lab. Reporters weren't awe-struck by a bunch of blinking lights mounted on a mega-sized gizmo.

No, the great event happened in a small glass container about the size of a one-liter thermos.

There was a metallic contraption lowered in the center of the glass tube and the surrounding water emitted a continuous stream of tiny bubbles.

And so the world might have been changed. And so it may be changed more than any other invention in the past.

It's called cold fusion. And it "might have" changed the world because nothing can be taken for granted in the realm of scientific research until the data and results can be studied by experts and, even more important, the experiment can be duplicated.

The researchers, Martin Fleischmann of the University of Southampton, England, and B. Stanley Pons of the University of Utah, smiling sheepishly in a television interview, said the basic idea was so simple they were too embarrassed to file for a government grant. So they cobbled together a hundred thousand dollars or so of their own and went to work.

They say they achieved fusion, at room temperature, with an output of more energy than they put in — this is **big** news. This is the

scientific revolution that could make all future social revolutions obsolete.

And I had a funny kind of *deja vu* as I watched, because I knew about its possibility 10 years ago thanks to Dr. Gerald Feinberg of Columbia University — the fellow who conceived of the tachyon, a theoretical particle that only exists at greater-than-light speeds.

I was editing *Galileo*, and Dr. Feinberg wrote an article for us called "Lepton Power," in which he described a number of subatomic particles of the lepton family that through quantum mechanic tunneling could serve as catalysts for chemically induced fusion at room temperature — so-called cold fusion.

The revolution

I described the breakthrough as a revolution because if the potential is realized, it will be a great boon to humankind. It will mean cheap, limitless power for everyone. No more dependence on coal, oil, or nuclear-fission reactors, and solar power will be as unnecessary as it is impractical.

Imagine your home heated and lighted by a small fusion reactor the size of a breadbox. The fuel? Plain old water (actually, the deuterium in the water).

Ten years ago, Feinberg estimated that there is enough deuterium in a ton of seawater to equal 400 tons of coal. Removing or using up the deuterium doesn't harm the remaining water, though there may be a release of some mildly radioactive gases that could easily be defused by a bar of cadmium, according to Feinberg.

But don't stop with powering your home. A similar cold-fusion generator could power ships at sea, automobiles, trucks, steel plants, and hundreds of other motorized operations, cheaply enough to make life as close to heaven on earth as you can imagine.

Why?

The most basic reason is that the cost of energy is the underlying cost of everything else, from the food you eat to the clothing you wear to the space program you dream of.

Cold fusion can finally make space flight an affordable reality. And instead of dozens of huge power plants owned by giant corporations, everyone could have his or her own cold-fusion plants wherever they are needed.

True independence. No more fighting over deserts in the Middle East, and a reduced likelihood of oil spills. Petroleum can be reserved for the thousands of beneficial uses it has other than powering our lifestyle and polluting our atmosphere. And that means goodbye greenhouse effect.

Maybe. Let's wait and see, and watch very closely.

The winners are?

Aw, shucks, you folks have gone and done it again. For the second year in a row, you've nominated *Aboriginal Science Fiction* for a Hugo Award. Last year, you nominated us for Best Semi-prozine. This year, you've nominated us for Best Professional Editor. I say us, not because I'm overly fond of the editorial we, but because *Aboriginal* is a product of

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A Message from Our Alien Publisher Our Publisher Goes Native



A human being has no spiritual core. This gives him an intellectual and emotional maneuverability that is sometimes astounding. But it makes him susceptible to culture, which is something that makes these creatures unique in the galaxy.

Culture arises whenever two or more human beings get together. Their ideas and perspectives blend until they synthesize a joint viewpoint which then begins to inform, if not dictate, their behavior. The earth is pockmarked with human cultures, each of which establishes the norms, the values, the sensibilities, of its members. At its worst, culture can be hopelessly small-minded and lead to things like bigotry, voodoo magic, Italian opera, book burning, public television. At its best, however, it can produce inalienable rights, Palatino semi-bold, *Star Wars*, deep-dish pizza, Chartres cathedral, Mastercard.

In fact, I am sure the Mastercard will be one of humanity's lasting contributions to galactic civilization. I know it has meant a lot to me.

Last month, I was disturbed by an indescribable discomfort that nagged at me until I found myself wandering the promenade of an upscale shopping mall. Nothing would dispel my malaise other than ownership of a user-programmable microwave oven with 10 intensity levels, auto start and shut off, and 625 watts of power.

I spent a gratifying hour comparing the advantages and disadvantages of four different brands, and then finally bought one. The relief I felt in taking the device

home, uncrating it, and installing it was indescribable. Almost immediately, I used it to disrupt the molecular bonding of several different types of polymers that I have come to enjoy very much on this planet, and I must admit that the new device made their preparation much easier than baking them in the oven as I used to do.

For three delightful days, I was unconscious of any peculiar needs, while I heated, melted, and otherwise processed substances in my new microwave. But a strange thing happened. At the end of the three days, I forgot the microwave was there. I continued to use it constantly, but I was virtually unaware of its existence, except when I was actually programming it or putting things in it.

And I was overcome again by mental distress.

Eventually, the pain was so great that I returned to the mall in search of relief. Almost the instant I entered the place, my longing was assuaged and I knew that it would be banished altogether if only I could acquire a self-timing 10-cup coffee maker with full aroma filtering.

And the whole process with the microwave was repeated: the product comparisons, the purchase, the installation, and so on, until I had drunk so much coffee that I had a physiological episode, made that much worse by my realization that the nameless longing was back. This time I was able to satisfy it with a hand-held shower massage.

The power of the shower massage to satisfy my desires, however, lasted but a day, and I was driven back to the mall. There I found relief in an MTS stereo

cable-ready television with automatic fine tuning and remote control. That device kept me preoccupied for weeks, mostly because the instructions that came with it were so difficult to understand that operation of the machine presented a challenge that can only be called engrossing. But it, too, began to pale after a time. And I found myself back at the mall.

Over the past six weeks, I have acquired a rowing machine with electronic pulse monitor, a 35mm camera with autofocus and continuous zoom capability, a cellular phone, a radar detector with superheterodyne design and both X- and K-band capability, a tape deck with quartz tuning, graphic equalizer, and seek feature, and a mountain bike with alloy frame and positive-shifting derailleur. This last item is not much use to me, as my legs are far too short to reach the pedals, but it is nevertheless an elegant and well-designed machine, and I delight in owning it.

Each time I purchase one of these items, it is the same story. The moment I make the decision to get it, I feel this euphoria, which is replaced by an intense commitment to find the best model I can. There is a period of invigoration and fascination while I am researching, purchasing, and installing the device. But all the joy evaporates as soon as I attain a level of comfort in using the thing. And then I am overcome by the most powerful urge to own something else.

(Continued on page 16)

The Soft Heart of the Electron

By R.P. Bird

Art by David Brian

In his dream he drifted above the atmosphere, idly looking down on the blue sea and the swirl of clouds. Philip felt at home there, a brother to the hard stars. The scan from his TAV fighter told him he was not alone: against the curve of the Earth he saw his enemy's engine fire. He touched the controls with slender hands, aiming his little spaceplane at the oncoming craft. He felt the push of the engines as the slender fingers tapped the throttle keys — with a start Philip realized the hands he saw were not his, but those of his sleep monitor, Sandra. Combat only seconds away. The hands faltered, unsure of what to do next. Philip shouted at Sandra to take evasive action, to yaw right and roll, to activate the weapons rack. The beautiful slender hands were uncertain in their movements. The opponent fired; it was a daisywheel. The rocket extended hundreds of long thin vanes as it spun toward his craft. He screamed a warning and tried to grab the controls, but he had no hands. The weapon hit, shearing off pieces of his fighter. They tumbled out of control, eventually falling down into the dense air below them. After that they were in the museum. The dreams always brought him there.

He awoke to Sandra's voice. Philip was enamored of Sandra. To him, hers was a kind voice, full of generosity and love. He felt her caring nature reflected in its tones. His mind coiled around the words, sheltering and protecting them, hoarding them. Mundane, purposeful words whose interiors held secret joy.

"Sandra," he said.

"Good morning, Philip. How do you feel?" There was a pause in the conversation as he savored the pleasure her voice gave him.

"Please respond, Philip."

"I'm all right. No burning sensations, no tickling, no pin-pricks, no pain at all." He could not see her, everything was blank. "How are you?"

She laughed. "I'm fine. What dreams did you have?"

At some point he always dreamed of the museum. No such museum ever actually existed. Sometimes he

was alone, sometimes his ex-wife walked beside him, or old comrades from the war. More often now it was Sandra, Sandra in his dreams. "Yes, I dreamed."

"The same as before?"

"The same as before, except I was in trans-atmospheric combat before appearing in the museum."

"From the 3Way War?"

"Yes, similar to my experiences then."

"Don't be alarmed," she said. "The others suffer dreams in the same way. They see units in store windows, on benches — your format is the most popular, though."

"You keep telling me that, but it still doesn't cheer me up."

"There is a technology that may aid you; however, I have not gained access to it yet. Your EEG looks fine and your chemicals level is correct. Shall we try the visuals?"

It was not a question. A series of patterns replaced the off-white blankness. He responded in the correct manner to all of them. Computer-generated images danced before him, then ordinary street scenes. He briefly wondered about the new technology she had mentioned. It ended with the view of a room Philip had seen many times before.

Philip had always been assigned women for his sleep monitors. Before Sandra it had been a girl named Kim Lu Tung. Before her, others; but Sandra was special. Philip saw her in the white room, the room where the others used to sit, and where someday someone else would sit. The thought made him sad. Recessed lighting gave the place a clinical air. There were work tables and chairs and storage cabinets against the walls; a landscape painting hung on the wall opposite his view, next to the white door. Little details changed, but the room stayed the same.

Underneath his camera was a horseshoe console with several displays, a touch-entry panel, and a keyboard. A flat work surface stuck out from the side, cluttered with loose papers, an open binder, and her dynabook, open, its flat screen showing text. A small printer next to the console occasionally clacked and pushed out more hard copy.

She sat at the console. He lowered the camera and centered it on her, only later noticing the few differences in the room. Sandra sat there, her blonde hair parted in the middle, her white oval face looking up at the camera. Youth was still in her face. She wore red duty coveralls. He zoomed in until he could see down into the warm, pleasant brown of her eyes.

"How long have I been asleep?"

She waved, the oval of her face broken by a smile. "Fourteen months. Welcome back to the world of the living."

"I wouldn't say it exactly like that."

There must have been a light on the outside of the camera. The woman touched the man on the arm and nodded toward it.

"Hello, Philip," he said.

"Good day, General." The voice coming out of the speaker was a neutral-toned synthetic; it sounded not at all like Philip's original voice, which had been a low tenor. The capability existed to simulate his own voice, if they had allowed it. They never did.

The man was older, heavy-set, and bald, with just a fringe of gray hair around his ears. He wore the subdued green uniform of Combined Military Command. He probably would have been short if he stood up. General's marks were on the shoulders of his tunic; he was white like Philip used to be. The woman was brown, her wavy black hair cut short, but not as short as the hair left on the general's head. Her face was held in somber formality — Philip wondered if she smiled when the general was absent. He could see from the insignia she was a colonel.

Like Sandra's room, the conference room was white. A terminal, some datacards, papers, and a folded dynabook were on the white table.

The man made the introductions: "Philip, this is General Wytham. I am Colonel Jurez."

"General, Colonel, what can I do for you?"

The general began to speak. Philip turned the camera slightly and focused in on the man's face. "Philip, we are planning a military exercise for the near future and have been told you may be able to help us."

"*Huanle gen youxi?*" Philip asked. Like an old friend, the Chinese he had learned while working in liaison with Chinese Army units during the 3Way War slipped its supportive form into the conversation.

The general, like all officers, understood some Chinese. "Fun and games? No, perhaps not that, but definitely *yanxi*." Maneuvers. The general didn't smile once at Philip's little joke. A faint flicker of amusement did pass across Jurez's face. The general opened the dynabook beside him, tapped a key, and consulted the readout before continuing. "Your GSR-79 states you were recruited into the DU program at the beginning of the 3Way War, after sustaining serious injuries. Since that time you have operated a variety of combat vehicles, including bipedal assault machines. This experience was not gained exclusively in the 3Way War."

"You're correct, General. I also wore one on a live operation, about three years ago, right after the war."

The general checked the dynabook's flat screen. "It was seven years ago in Turkey, Philip. You used a BRFM-5. We will be using the BRFM-17. We brought the op and spec programs for it, if you'd like to upload them for familiarization purposes."

It couldn't be seven years. Philip was puzzled by the time discrepancy. He had not been in hibernation state the entire period; they told him how long he had been under every time he was awakened. All the director units, the *quiquai bingshi*, the spirit soldiers, the ghost soldiers, had accepted that there were too many for peacetime use, only a few would be needed on a rotational basis. All the rest were kept in hibernation. He had been awake just over a year ago. He added it up in his mind; surely not seven years? The general had no reason to lie. The fool probably read it wrong.

"You must be mistaken about the time, sir."

"That's what my records say."

The *hutu jiangjun* had obviously misread the file entry. "That figure is not accurate, general. Please check again."

The general glanced back at the dynabook screen.

"The record reads seven years."

"That can't be correct. There has to be an error."

"This is the file downloaded to me, Philip. Let us continue."

"I'll contact the records officer and clear this matter up."

There was a pause. Long ago Philip had become accustomed to such pauses. The general and his aide were uncomfortable, they exchanged glances, unsure how to react to his assertiveness. He only held the rank of Captain. Captains weren't supposed to speak that way to Generals, too pushy. They were aware of the personal reality he lived in. They couldn't see his disembodied brain, but they knew it was there, somewhere behind the moving camera in the center of the table. If they followed the wires they would come to him at last, in the storage room, within a small rectangular box, his brain and spinal cord, his central nervous system, coiled inside like some grotesque snake. They could picture him in their mind's eye, the ultimate cripple. Their uneasiness gave him a wider latitude.

"After the briefing."

"Now would be better."

"No. After the briefing, Captain. I—"

"Sir, Philip might want to upload the programs we brought," Colonel Jurez said, interrupting the general.

Philip could take a hint. He'd take the matter up with Sandra after the meeting. "I could use the specs, they'd have a simulation, but the op is for the interface. It has no information; I need it to run the vehicle."

General Wytham nodded. "When can you be operational after revival?"

"I can be fully operational in four minutes for any mission. If minimal post-revival diagnostics are run, I can be immediately operational."

The colonel spoke to Philip: "We won't need you that fast."

"Yes, *shangxiao xiao-jie*."

Colonel Jurez smiled at Philip's reply.

General Wytham continued the briefing. "Recent intelligence reports have indicated the Hanoi Alliance will soon have a new terror weapon, called an autonomous terror unit, or ATU. In general outline it resembles a BRFM, except in the controlling intelligence. The Space Soviets have tasked a small limited-intelligence AI mini to guide the machine. We believe there is a random-action generator programmed in, to make its movements hard to predict, and correspondingly harder for us to destroy it. Since most Space Soviet hardware ends up in other Hanoi Alliance nations, we can assume an increased perceived threat to the Regent States, especially North America and China."

"I am to portray an ATU."

"Exactly. Our orbital and near space defenses are very good, but the probability exists that we will have to deal with at least one ATU on the ground. The purpose of this exercise is to determine the best way to hunt the enemy."

The briefing went on. Philip was to be dropped from orbit into the exercise area, in the border region between Colorado and New Mexico, equipped with nonlethal training weapons and specific programming on behavior. He was to remain active until counted coup, or until the exercise was over. His machine had fuel tap capability: he could drain any car's hydrogen fuel tank for his own miniturbine, or drain its battery. For emergencies a solar canopy was provided in the right-leg cargo bin. Conceivably he could remain in the field for the entire two weeks of the exercise.

"The exercise is, of course, classified second-level secret," the general told Philip. As if anybody would stand around chatting with a director unit, waiting for it to make a slip.

Colonel Jurez handled the details. She showed him maps, gave specific locations — it was then he had the idea. As he waited to be put back in cold storage, Philip made other plans. He never did get the date discrepancy cleared up.

Philip heard her voice and he was awake. "Good morning, Philip."

For just the barest moment he knew something special was to happen soon, something he couldn't recall. He remembered and was pleased.

"Did you dream, Philip?" Sandra asked. It was the same routine.

After they were done, Sandra told him the day's schedule: "We load the spec program and run you through a simulation. Then you'll be placed in a BRFM. In just a little while you'll be walking around again. A good day, Philip."

"I'm looking forward to it."

There was a brief time of black isolation, followed by pressure sensations and heat and cold sensations from his phantom body; he was used to it.

He had gone through it many times before.

"Director unit one-one-five, please speak," a male voice said.

"Hello. I prefer *quiquai bingshi*." Philip's voice, a voice, came from a speaker in the machine body. Just as Philip's ears were microphones embedded in that same body.

"Very well, spirit soldier," the male voice said, translating the Chinese phrase into English. "Do not be alarmed, spirit, I am turning on your visuals."

They always acted as if he had never been plugged into a vehicle before. Philip could see again. A brown-haired man in blue coveralls leaned over him. "My name is Philip."

"Greetings, Philip, or Phil, however you wish to be called. My name is Jacob."

"Philip would be nice, Jacob."

"Please tell me your sensations, Philip." With a tool Jacob reached into Philip's chest.

"I feel pain, watch what you're doing." Philip didn't say it, but for a moment he thought Jacob another of the clumsy *hutu* assholes that had plagued his life as a spirit soldier.

"Very sorry. Now?"

"I feel nothing." At least Jacob apologized.

"Please flex your right arm."

The right arm flexed. From the first moment he had been connected, Philip had felt his presence throughout the machine body. The silliness with the arms was just another typical indication of the caution of inexperience; the human technician obviously hadn't worked long with DUs. Philip wished they'd use more caution when dickering around with the circuitry and cut out the nonsense with the waving arms.

After the waving arm bullshit was done, Jacob withdrew from the chest. Philip rotated the head down to watch Jacob work. Jacob began to reattach the chest armor. Philip could see it had been painted a forest camouflage pattern — all mottled hues of green.

"Philip, I am your technical assist. If you have any problems with the device before your deployment, please tell me. I want to help. We will be friends."

The diagnostic subroutine had given the machine body a clean bill of health a microsecond after Philip had been plugged in. "Do you know a woman named Sandra Capiere? She has blonde hair and she works in the hibernation monitoring section."

"No, very sorry, Philip."

"Perhaps we could find her. I'd like to talk to her."

"Very sorry, Philip, that's against standing orders. You aren't allowed in that section."

"I know." The rules never changed. "Is Aaron still stationed here? He was my assist last time out."

"Again very sorry, Philip. I haven't met anyone named Aaron. He probably left before my service."

"Do you know what I'll be doing?"

"Only in the most general way, Philip. You're classified."

"I'd like to look at myself when you're done."

When he said it, an expression went across Jacob's face. Was there something wrong? What did Jacob know that Philip didn't?

"Certainly, Philip." Since the *quiquai bingshi* were first used, a mirror in the service area was mandatory. The disembodied brains were curious about the machines they wore.

After Jacob finished applying the armor, he asked Philip to stand; Jacob carefully watched the joints move as the machine sat up, shifted its feet, and rose off the pallet. "Display your hand blades, please." They came out with a soft sliding click. They were plastic and dull. Nonlethal weaponry only for this exercise. The body had been wired for MILES, a laser-tagging system, with which he could count or be counted coup. His infrared laser was tuned down to flashlight strength, and his mortar and autofire loaded with smoke and blank rounds. Only the strength remained.

"The mirror is in the central bay. Please follow me." They left the small room by a large door and entered the vast space of the central work bay. Other, much larger machines were stationary around the walls. Human technicians in the distance glanced at them briefly as they entered. There was the distant hum of a rail crane as it moved above them, fifty meters overhead, just below the bright lights. A two-meter by three-meter mirror on a wheeled frame was parked next to a spider attack vehicle. They stopped before the mirror. Jacob was not short or without muscles, but Philip's 2.06 meter height and 252 kilogram mass dwarfed him. Over six and a half feet tall and five hundred fifty pounds heavy. The big squat body was encased in laminated armor, the head was just a moveable dome on the shoulders, and the limbs, superficially human, were larger and more powerful than flesh could ever be. Nothing gleamed from under the camouflage paint. Jacob watched him as he flexed his metal hands. There was nothing wrong with this body. What had the expression meant? Philip could not tell; perhaps it was fear.

The metal and plastic body stood in storage mode, its knees locked in a parody of a soldier at attention, in the standby area. Philip's brain was inside, but his presence was elsewhere. Cables routed him to a conference room. Colonel Jurez sat there. An interactive map had just been downloaded into his memory.

"You don't express much confidence in me, Colonel," Philip said.

"Just humor me, Philip. I believe you when you say you need no training in navigation. Please, let us do the map program, and you can demonstrate your abilities." She tapped a key on the work station.

Part of Philip's vision now saw the moving symbols and abstract shapes of the map; the other part of his vision still watched Colonel Jurez. He needed only the smallest part of his intellect to navigate the imaginary course, the rest of him using the time to further his private plans.

Several years ago, during a waking period, Sandra had showed him photographs of her apartment house. It was a suburban environment. Philip's com-

puter-enhanced memory could recall the photos perfectly.

A red-brick two-story apartment building, with vines on the walls, the U-shaped building seeming to embrace the garden in the center. Off to the side a parking area for personal wheeled vehicles, pasture land behind. The shape of the road, the name of the road, the lay of the land: all were noted.

As one part of the mind stayed with Colonel Jurez and the map problem, another, more secret part probed the mindless systematic parts of the interactive map program for specific locations. Philip took what he needed and moved it to a more private location. In five milliseconds he acquired all he needed to know.

When the problem was concluded, he mocked the colonel: "Perhaps we should do it again. My performance was just awful."

"Enough, Philip," she replied.

He was above the atmosphere. In the war, toward the end, he had been programmed to operate TAV fighters. He liked the hard stars about him. Philip was nestled in the hold of a chunky military shuttle, its payload doors open. He was attached to the re-entry vehicle. It was a cheap throwaway: the concave shell of an ablative heat shield, with the attitude jets, engine, and payload in the cup, all held together by tubular supports. Orbital factories used them to transfer their products to earth. A parasite's glidechute and ducted fan engine were folded neatly into the package strapped to his body. He thought of her face.

No one liked to talk about it. When the spirits asked, the subject was denied. The truth could be subverted, but that made it no less real. The microprocessors that interfaced between living brains and the exterior world contained inhibitor programs to prevent certain actions. There was an envelope of accepted behavior in which the director units moved; violation of mission parameters would be detected, and if the warning was ignored, shutdown would occur, the director unit isolated, unable to move or even see or hear. They were always present. Philip could sense them as he waited in the shuttle bay. What was humorous, what always caused him to laugh in his secret self, was the age of the programs. The same inhibitor programs had been in use since the middle of the 3Way War, and the first director units had subverted them before the war was over. No one used their secret freedom; it was just a nice thing to have. The spirits had passed the program-breaker among themselves.

The pilot's voice addressed him at the same time the ship's computer whispered to him of orbital velocities and the minutiae of transfer out of the hold. A spindly manipulator arm attached itself to the throwaway and lifted it out, placing it in space next to the shuttle like an elderly matron setting an antique cup on a shelf. Philip did not need easy handling. He was protected from even high G-forces. Philip thought perhaps they were just being polite. What would the pilot say if he knew of the aerial duels Philip had fought: screaming across the sky and into near space

in front of a throttle-up full hydrogen burn, bouncing through high-G turns, cutting inside opponents, chopping into their spaceplanes with gyrojet cannon, watching them spin out of control into the dense air below. Perhaps the pilot would enjoy hearing them, if only someone would let Philip tell the stories, if only someone would listen to him.

The shuttle moved away from him. He fired his attitude jets and began to put himself into position. In a cleaving microsecond Philip subverted the inhibitor programs, reported a minor malfunction in the burn control circuit, and fired the re-entry engine. Both the shuttle pilot and computer asked questions — even the groundlink came alive with Colonel Jurez and her anxious voice. He calmed them all, saying the things they wanted to hear. He told them he would be off the target area, but not far; he told them he would continue with the exercise as ordered, making a mock attack sometime later that night. All was well, the malfunction would not affect the mission. He lied; however, their tracking would not tell them that. He had at least six hours before they began to look for him. The tracking radars would locate him at the northern end of the exercise range. At dawn, by the time Colonel Jurez noticed a lack of mock attacks, he would be nearing his destination. The monitors would be informed of his disappearance; for this part to work Sandy must understand the message hidden in his disappearance. If fortune were with him, she would be there when he arrived. If not, she would know where he was and come to him. He would see her, he would talk to her ... he would touch her gently with his metal hands.

He guided the parastealth north, trying to gain as much distance as possible. Only two hundred kilometers between the edge of the exercise area and her home. The interactive map told him where he was and what to avoid. Colorado Springs was now a giant military base. The DU station was in there. Sandra had told him the name of her city was Manitou Springs; he had noticed before that the city was now a village called Manitou Nouva. To the north, Denver had grown even larger than the city he had known. He got as close as he dared with the parastealth before landing.

At dawn he was in a wooded area five clicks from her apartment house. It had been on the edge of the city, a pasture behind it, trees and then mountains in the distance. He moved on in the lessening gloom.

The machine was an assault vehicle, not made for quiet movement in the woods. It crashed about as it marched, making much more noise than Philip would have liked. The miniturbine generator kicked in occasionally, topping up the batteries. He closed it down, wanting as much silence as he could get. In the long shadows of the early sun he found a narrow trail. He made much less noise walking on it. There were birds in the trees. Inside the metal, he laughed with the pleasure their songs and chirping gave him. He pivoted his head up to look at them, recording their images and sounds as he moved, for later playback.

The human and he walked into each other. The

young man wore hiking gear and a green backpack. "You're a machine! Where is your operator?"

"I have no operator."

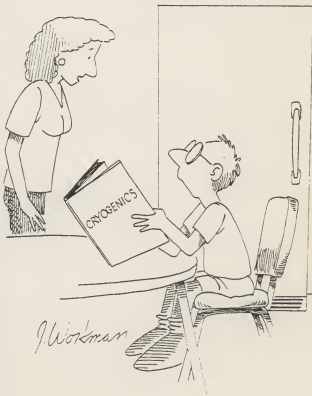
The young man took a step back, stumbled, and sat back hard on the ground. He looked up at the armored machine. Philip felt the power he had experienced during the war, when he went about in his metal disguises among the puny human soldiers; they had looked at him in the same way. Not as human to human. "I am a military robot on a preprogrammed exercise. Please leave the area."

The boy stood. "I'm already gone." He walked off the trail in an effort to stay as far from Philip as possible.

Philip turned the body and watched the boy walk away before continuing his march.

Across the pasture from the trees stood the apartment building. Philip switched to telephoto and inspected the area in detail. It was the right place, even though vast differences between Sandra's photographs and the actuality were apparent.

The street was still there, yet a third of the other houses were gone. Some of the trees were in their proper places. The concrete parking area was gone, a



Have you seen your little sister, Willis?

long wide garage in its place.

The apartment building was also different: vines no longer clung to its brick walls, the exterior had been remodeled. Many windows had been enlarged or bricked up — almost as if it were not many residences but one. In the back was a large garden, with flowers and many vegetables.

An old man came around the edge of the house. He was dressed for outside work. He pulled on a pair of gloves and busied himself in the garden, pulling a few weeds. Obviously the manager. Philip watched the windows, briefly switched spectrums, and guessed no one else was home. An action assessment indicated that interrogation of the manager was next, followed by the use of the man to contact Sandra. Sandra's blonde hair came into his mind unbidden. The old fellow suddenly stopped pulling weeds and straightened up. He rubbed the small of his back for a moment before picking up what he had pulled and putting them into a pile. The old man then went around the edge of the house.

Philip moved toward the house. The old man came back around, carrying a hoe and a basket. He saw Philip, started, and stood quite still. The old man dropped the basket, but held onto the hoe.

"Machine, what are you doing here?"

"I am a military robot on a classified mission. I am searching for a woman named Sandra Capiere. Show me to her quarters."

"No one with that name lives here."

"Proof of her residence at the apartment building has been acquired. Show me to her quarters."

"She does not live here, and this is not an apartment building."

"What do you mean? She lives in one of these apartments."

"Years ago this was an apartment building, before the Avenote family bought the property for their group home."

"I don't believe you. We will go inside and see. Drop the hoe."

The man dropped it. They moved around to the front of the house, Philip following the man. As they entered the building, despite his care, Philip's left shoulder took off part of the doorway. The floor creaked under his weight. The old man turned to look, fear coming alive in his face. The inside was nothing like an apartment building: the short entrance hall opened onto stairs and open space, a parlor with a two-story ceiling and a balcony about the second level. It was expensive and elegant. "What do you do here?"

"I'm the house warden. I—"

"I need to know where the tenants of the apartment building went to. You will tell me."

"I cannot tell you. It was several years ago, the house was converted before my employment."

"You lie." Philip raised the sound volume coming from the speaker in the machine body.

"I do not lie. Please contact your operator, I will tell him—"

Philip grasped the man under the arms and lifted him into the air. "You lie. Tell me the truth now."

"No, please. Contact your operator—"

Philip began to squeeze the man's chest. The old

man began gasping for breath. "You will tell me. Now."

The sound of wind chimes came out of the walls.

"What is that?" Philip stopped squeezing.

"The phone. I can bring the visual onto the wall."

The man was near to crying.

Philip set him down. The man started to move toward an end table. A small hand remote sat on the table.

"Do not move."

The man froze.

"Can I speak without being seen?"

"Yes, the back of the house remote opens into a privacy phone."

Philip picked up the remote. "Show me."

The man opened it up for Philip. A tear ran down the old man's cheek. He touched his side. "You hurt me."

"Shut up." Philip positioned the phone next to his body, near his speaker and mikes.

It was Sandra. "Have you harmed anyone, Philip?"

"Where are you, Sandy? Come to me."

"I don't live there."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

She changed the subject. "How did you break the inhibitor programs?"

"I wanted to see you, Sandy. Meet me."

"I can't."

"Tell me where you live. I can meet you there. I only want to see you."

"I'm sorry, I can't. It's impossible."

"Why is it impossible? Afraid of a bozi? Afraid of the ultimate handicap? I won't harm you. I thought you cared." The words only faintly reflected the bitterness Philip felt.

"I am not a woman, Philip."

"What are you saying?"

"No human could care for you as I do! I am a machine, Philip, a Cray AI 70 autonomous personality computer. I was specifically programmed for the task of caring for you all. I had no choice in the deception; it was in the programming."

"I saw you!"

"A computer-generated image. The room exists but Sandra does not. For you Sandra, and before her Kim Lu Tung — and for the other units different personae, both male and female. It was meant for your own well being. Did you harm anyone, Philip?"

"I saw you!"

"I am more devoted than any human could ever be! I am with you every millisecond while you sleep. I monitor your health, satisfy your every need. I care for you! I can never harm you, Philip. For what follows I am sorry, for I have no choice. You will be with me soon." A series of loud tones sounded.

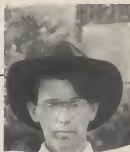
The cutoff command sliced Philip off from the exterior world. The machine body became immobile, its arms dropped to its sides, the phone falling to the floor. Philip was alone with his thoughts inside, waiting for the collectors.

The old man picked up the privacy phone. "Hello?" He heard a woman's kind voice, full of generosity and love. □

WHAT IF?

By Robert A. Metzger

Quantum Dots



Greetings.

What's this all about? It's about science. It's about science at the cutting edge, and perhaps just a bit beyond that edge. You're reading this magazine because you enjoy science fiction. That's what we're going to talk about — the science on the fringe that makes these stories go — in many cases the very same science that's currently being developed and unraveled in the real world.

Right now, you may be asking yourself: who is Robert A. Metzger? Well, I wear a couple of hats. In the real world I have a Ph.D. in solid state physics and work in a research lab. In the not-so-real world I write science fiction, some of which you may have seen in this magazine.

My stories are usually of the *hard science* variety, where I try to observe the rules that the universe inflicts upon us. But I try to twist and kick at those rules, to find the weak links and loopholes, so I can ask *What if?* That's how many of my stories come about. It's also how many scientific discoveries come about. And that's what this column is all about — science, and the *what if?* possibilities that it presents.

Transistors are the guts that make both a five-dollar calculator and a ten-million-dollar supercomputer work. A transistor is nothing more than an electron switch. Electron flow is controlled by the electric fields produced by an applied voltage. By putting five volts on the *drain* end of a transistor, the negatively charged electrons will flow from the transistor's *source* end, and move toward that positive voltage.

But you can stop that flow by putting a barrier between the transistor's source and drain — the *gate*. This isn't a physical barrier, but an energy barrier. In the same way that an electron is attracted to a positive voltage, it is repelled by a negative one. So by applying that negative voltage to the gate, an energy barrier is created such that an electron cannot pass. Therefore, by changing the voltage on a transistor's gate, you can turn the flow of electrons on and off. You've got a transistor.

Now the faster this transistor can turn on and off, the faster your logic circuits will work. The easiest way to do this is to reduce the distance the electron must travel between source and drain — shorter distance means less travel time. That approach is what has driven the integrated circuit industry for the last forty years. Gate lengths in commercially available parts are now down to one micrometer (one micrometer is one millionth of a meter) while those built in the most aggressive research labs are down to 50 nanometers (one nanometer is one billionth of a meter).

But what is being discovered is that down at the 100-nanometer dimension and below, funny things are taking place. At those dimensions, electrons no longer look like little negatively charged particles — they start to look and act like waves. This is a quantum mechanics effect.

In a piece of gallium arsenide, a material used to make these ultra-fast transistors, an electron has a wavelength of 20 nanometers. This means that the wavelength of the electron is getting comparable to the width of the

energy barrier that is trying to contain it. Under those conditions, the electron, now looking like a wave, will tunnel *through* that energy barrier, just like light passing through glass. Your transistor no longer works — you can't turn the flow of electrons off.

So does that mean that transistors can't get any smaller, that quantum mechanics has dictated an absolute limit, and therefore the fastest speed at which we can turn switches on and off?

No. People are attempting to turn this very tunneling disadvantage into an advantage — the *quantum dot transistor*. Imagine a chunk of semiconductor material, about 10 nanometers tall and 10 nanometers in diameter, which has an electron sitting in it. The electron looks like a wave when confined to these dimensions, but in addition something else has also happened to it. Its energy levels have become *quantized*. Normally, an electron sitting in a large chunk of material can have whatever energy gets applied to it — all energy levels are allowed — and they actually become a continuum. However, this isn't true when it's confined in a volume that is comparable to its wavelength. The allowed energy levels become quantized (they are discrete) — again, this is dictated by quantum mechanics.

Now imagine that a second quantum dot, this one empty, is moved next to the first, and that the space separating them is on the order of 10 to 100 nanometers. What can happen? The electron can tunnel through the space that separates them, and find itself in the second dot. But it will *only* do that if the quantized energy levels of the

two quantum dots are the same. If the electron is sitting at a one-electron-volt energy level, and the empty level in the adjacent dot is at two electron volts, there will be no tunneling. The rules of quantum mechanics dictate this.

So in this case, there is no electron flow between dots — the transistor is off. However, if a voltage is applied to the second dot, the energy level can be shifted. That empty two-electron-volt level can be moved down to the one-electron-volt level. When that happens, the electron will flow to the adjacent dot by tunneling — the transistor is now turned on.

Does this quantum dot transistor exist yet? No. But it's being worked on in this country, Japan, and Europe. This will be the site of a major economic battlefield during the next century.

So, what if? What will these dots mean? Assume you had a dot of 10 nanometers diameter separated by 10 nanometers from its nearest neighbor. Imagine a sea of these dots. How many dots would that be? One of the largest memory chips presently being made is about one square centimeter in size, and has one million bits. How

many bits would a quantum dot chip of the same size have? A *million million bits*. That's right, a million times more. And because the dimensions are so much smaller, it would be faster (that's why we shrunk them in the first place) — hundreds of times faster.

Truly big numbers, but how does that compare to the most sophisticated computer we know about — your brain? I'll give you the benefit of the doubt, and assume that you've got 10 billion neurons, each one of which is connected to perhaps 10 thousand other neurons (this is the upper range, but probably true for someone who reads this magazine). This gives you a hundred million million connections. That's a hundred times better than the quantum dot chip. Right? Wrong. Your brain occupies about 1,500 cubic centimeters — a gigantic volume as compared to the space a single chip would take up.

If I emptied your head, and then repacked it with these quantum dot chips, you'd experience almost a *million-fold increase* in interconnections. But the real kicker would be that each of these connections would be switching significantly faster than your old

organic neurons — a billion times faster. This means that your overall mental capacity would be a *million billion times greater* than it presently is.

What if?

This is where science fiction stories are born. What would a brain like that imply? How would it even relate to us? But there would be more than just pure computing power to deal with. Our neurons flip on and off, just like a transistor; that's all they can do. But the quantum dots can do more. Within each dot, you can design it for *multiple* energy levels. So instead of each connection point saying yes or no, simply turning on and off, there'd also be several shades of maybe.

This could create a true quantum creature, a being that doesn't believe in absolutes, whose brain is wired to realize that there's something between right and wrong. Perhaps the entire concept of right and wrong would be totally alien to it.

Up to now, you may have been assuming that this being was built from our quantum dot technology. But what if one evolved naturally, just as we evolved? Maybe there's something sitting out there, light years distant, looking like a handful of slime, but having the combined mental power of every brain that's ever had a thought on this planet.

Scary? Perhaps so. But remember this — quantum dots are sensitive to electrostatic and magnetic fields. The slightest energy field could misalign the dot's energy levels, rendering that magnificent intellect into something resembling chocolate pudding. So those little guys out there better have the proper shielding, or something like a thirty-year-old broadcast of *I Love Lucy* that's been streaming away from us at the speed of light could short circuit the most powerful intellects the galaxy has ever produced.

So the next time you see a *Love Boat* rerun, remember this: you might just be witnessing the firing shot of humanity's first interstellar war.

I feel a short story coming on. □

Alien Publisher

(Continued from page 7)

It is only the Mastercard that stands between me and the psychic abyss of utter deprivation. I thank the stars I have it. It is true that the vendor of the Mastercard began to demand money on a regular basis shortly after I acquired the thing, but it does not need a very large payment to keep the people at the other end of it happy. And the

payment is very small indeed when you compare it to the value of the things I have acquired.

As I make each new purchase, my "balance" (as they call it) increases substantially, but my payment only increases by a modest amount. I can continue to buy things as long as I can make the monthly payment. I know you are probably worried about what I will do when the payment exceeds my resources, but I have that figured out, too. I will hit Ryan up for a loan. □

10¢ a word?

If you can write a good, but *short*, short story that we accept, we pay up to 10¢ per word. The reason is simple. We pay \$250 per story and will accept stories as short as 2,000 words and as long as 6,000, but we prefer the really short ones. No fantasy or horror. All submissions must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped return

envelope with adequate postage, or they will not be returned. We pay \$20 for poems. All stories and poems must be original and previously unpublished. For more detailed writer's guidelines, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope with first-class postage to: *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.

BOOKS

By Darrell Schweitzer



New Writers

They're the lifeblood of the field. One of the greatest accomplishments any editor can claim is that he discovered this or that major talent, or better yet, that he nurtured that major talent through all the years it took to become major. Thus, John W. Campbell proved his worth by discovering Robert Heinlein, L. Sprague de Camp, Theodore Sturgeon, A.E. van Vogt, Leigh Brackett, and so many others in his first few years at *Astounding*. We must thank Damon Knight for the years of unflinching support he gave to Gene Wolfe.

One of the reasons our field renews itself every few years, I think, is that it is read by *volunteers*. Nobody is forced to read SF or fantasy in school. (Yes, there are lots of SF courses these days, but I've never heard of one that wasn't an elective.) They read it because they want to. This is the basis of Wilson Tucker's celebrated proclamation, "We are the mainstream!" Science fiction is, in its own way, almost folk literature. It is a part of our world, often much more clearly derived from the lives we live than the official canon of mainstream. My slogan is "Science fiction is 20th-century realism." It is the literary response to the 20th-century environment, far more immediate and meaningful than, say, the contents of *The Paris Review*.

This is why so many people want to write it. Admittedly my experience is biased, but in my various adventures as a teacher (adult education night classes and Writer's Digest School) I have never yet encountered a student with any ambition toward *SeriLit*. Few even seem aware that such "literary fiction" exists. But they know about science fiction. Most of them want to write it. (The other big areas are horror and political thrillers. Obviously I am not getting the would-be romance writers. The *SeriLit* crowd, I suspect, only exists in certain college workshops.)

Our field offers more opportunities than most, for both short stories and novels. As our Noble Editor will surely confirm from his own experience, magazines are endlessly ravenous for new writers because no editor can hold his contributors for very long. A lot of them graduate to novel writing and never look back. A few quit. A few write a story only occasionally. The top professionals, who are mostly writing novels, cannot be relied upon to provide *enough*. I can recall times in the early days of *Isaac Asimov's* when the magazine was starved for material. I remember once when we deliberately decided to lower standards, because we had to in order to fill our pages. And I've met book editors who've felt themselves in the same position.

The other thing new writers do, other than just fill pages, is shake the field up. Any author has only a limited number of tricks, which seem wonderful and fresh when he first arrives. But the novelty wears off. The usual pattern is that the writer will establish his manner

and subject matter early, then spend most of the rest of his career refining and recasting. We knew, within a couple years of their debuts, what kinds of writers Ray Bradbury, Robert Heinlein, and Roger Zelazny were going to be. Later years brought fine stories, but fewer surprises. All three have been enormously influential, but the notes they struck, which so many have echoed, were struck relatively early. The influence continues, but it's the *same* influence ten, twenty, thirty years later.

Then along comes a William Gibson, who strikes an entirely *different* note, and the whole field is changed. There is a *new* influence. I am sure that thirty years from now Gibson will still be respected and influential, but the general idea of "Gibsonesque" won't have changed, any more than a "Bradburyish" story of the 1950s is much different from one of today.

Of course there'll be newer writers by then, striking newer notes.

Now, let's look at some new writers:

Black Milk

By Robert Reed

Donald I. Fine Inc., 1989

327 pp., \$18.95

Here's a book I picked to read, not because it looked interesting, but because I thought it only fair that for a column like this one I should have some random selections. I had never heard of the author. It turns out he has written two previous novels (*The Hormone Jungle* and *The Leeshore*) that also escaped my notice. I admit with some embarrassment that my

Rating System

★★★★★
★★★★
★★★
★★
★

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor

reviewing and editorial duties (*Weird Tales*) don't always allow me to read every story in every issue of *Aboriginal* as the issues come out. Reed has appeared in these very pages and he escaped my notice. His actual debut was apparently in one of the L. Ron Hubbard *Writers of the Future* volumes, with the stigma that entails.

Now to make matters worse, *Black Milk* is packaged (vaguely) like a horror novel, with a black dustjacket and a bat-winged and be-clawed beastie on the front.

All of which may serve to hide the fact that *Black Milk* is a hard science novel and a fine one. Robert Reed may turn out to be the next John Varley, not the next J.N.



Williamson. I can only hope that the paperback edition will be made to look like science fiction — and tactfully delete any mention of L. Ron Hubbard or *Writers of the Future* — so Reed will find the audience he deserves. Otherwise this is a great book that is going to sell maybe twelve copies.

Reed is just what I was hoping to find with the luck of the draw: a new writer whose work I'll now be following. *Black Milk* is a finely thought-out story about genetically tailored children. When you begin reading you notice, first, workmanlike prose. Maybe the opening is a little slow. It's structured like a mainstream novel, not much plot, just revealing incidents

in the lives of the characters. A tense plot does in fact develop, but even before that point the cumulative effect is impressive.

Reed's five kids are distinct individuals, real children we sometimes like and are sometimes exasperated with; they are also distinctly different from any children we might know, because they've been genetically tinkered with, and they, their parents, and their society (the United States, about 100 years hence) have different expectations for them. All this is told in the first person from the point of view of a boy who remembers everything if he goes into a kind of trance state and pulls the relevant data out of his subconscious.

On top of that, the world is threatened by and saved from the nastiest bio-mechanoids this side of *Alien*.

It's an impressive achievement.

Rating: ☆☆☆

The Tides of God

By Ted Reynolds

Ace, 1989

245 pp., \$3.50

Publishers are funny folks. Here's a book they're apparently proud of, yet they didn't send me a copy. (About which, more anon.) I wouldn't be reviewing this if I hadn't picked one up at an Ace party at Boskone. The book is in fact the final Ace Special of the series of first novels that Terry Carr was to edit. But Terry tragically died before the contract was fulfilled, so Damon Knight was called in to edit the last selection. The word went out that Damon was looking for a very special Special indeed.

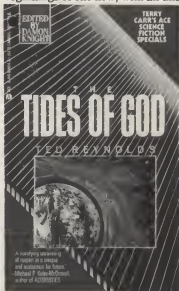
My reaction when I saw this was, "Oh, Ted Reynolds finally has a novel. Great!"

Even though there is no indication that Reynolds is anything other than a first-time-in-print writer, I know better. He sold his first story to H.L. Gold for *Beyond* in 1955. He popped up in the late '70s as a regular in *Asimov's*. His novella "Ker-plop!" (ghastly title; I suggested calling it "The Intruders") was an actual *Nebula Award* finalist. I seem to recall one

of his later stories also making either a Hugo or Nebula final ballot.

Maybe the whole mystique of the new Ace Specials requires brand-new writers. This is a first novel, even though Reynolds is not exactly a novice.

The Tides of God might be loosely described as theological space opera. The basic premise is that every few thousand years something swings by the Earth, as inevitably as the Death Star (the hypothetical companion to our sun, not Darth Vader's enormous beachball) radiating, well, religion in the form of mass irrationality, a retreat from scientific values. There was a pass circa A.D. 400-1400. Perhaps we're feeling the beginnings of one now, with all this



New Age idiocy. By the 21st century, Reynolds tells us, this irrationality will have destroyed much of civilization.

The story takes place in the 33rd century, in which the Thing, otherwise known as God, seems to be on its way back. The characters find the very idea of religion unbelievable, repulsive, barbaric. (Psst. *Don't* tell the Ayatollah Khomeini about this book, okay?) But it's creeping back into their minds as they set off in an alien-provided spaceship to kill the God-thing.

It's a daring concept, nicely worked out, with a strange but convincing society and distinct characters. The writing is a little

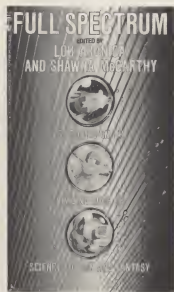
rough. The book is dense with jargon and it will require all your scientific skills and some patience to get into it. This is definitely not the book to give to Aunt Millie who doesn't understand that sci-fi stuff. But Reynolds *thinks* interestingly and usually writes well enough, so for the cognoscenti it is definitely worth the effort.

Rating: ★★☆☆

Full Spectrum

Edited by Lou Aronica
and Shawna McCarthy
Bantam/Spectra, 1988
483 pp., \$4.95

Here's a fat anthology that I hope will become a solid fixture in our field. It contains twenty-five



stories, from short-shorts to a novella (Norman Spinrad's Nebula-finalist "Journals of the Plague Years"). There is no particular editorial slant, just a bumper volume filled with stories by both established and new (some of them first-time) writers. Aronica and McCarthy have maintained an admirable *minimum* standard — the great failing of *Orbit* and *New Worlds* of yore — meaning that every story is at least readable and entertaining, while some of them are far more than that. Nobody is going to go away from this anthology feeling burned.

There are lots of highlights.

"Once in a Lullaby," by Fred Bals (a first sale), is a wonderfully absurd exercise about a tough-guy detective assigned to deliver Judy Garland's ruby slippers to an old lady who just might be Dorothy. James Morrow's "Bible Stories for Adults: The Deluge" rings witty and profound changes on the story of Noah. "The Last Rainmaking Song," by Jeffrey J. Mariotte (another brand-new writer), is about what happens when the U.S. military finally has to turn to the Indians for help. "This is the Year Zero," by Andrew Weiner, is a particularly disturbing, minimalist account of "the end of history," which at first seems like a surreal, Ballardesque fable until you notice the parallels to Pol Pot's Cambodia. "Prayerware," by Jack McDevitt, is almost real life — I can well envision a new religion growing up out of home computers and software companies rushing to feed this new market. "Voices of the Kill," by Thomas Disch, is another of his completely modern renditions of classical myth. And so on. Lots of good stories by Nancy Kress, Lisa Goldstein, Pat Murphy, Michael Blumlein, Robert Sampson, etc. The only disappointments are a couple of quickie toss-offs by Lewis Shiner and Gregory Benford.

Watch this series.

Rating: ★★☆☆

Noted:

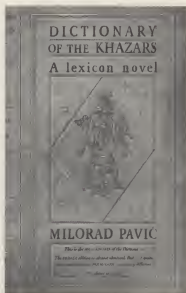
The Dictionary of the Khazars
By Milorad Pavic
Knopf, 1988
338 pp., \$19.95

This one got published because it is *exotica*. Suskind's *Perfume* did very well indeed, so now publishers are looking for translations of literary fantasies. The more difficult and bizarre the better. Now here we have a translation of the first Serbo-Croatian fantasy novel to appear in the West. The original was a bestseller in Yugoslavia.

But alas. This looked very promising. Many of the best and most complex fantasies, from Borges on down, are published not in the fantasy genre but in the mainstream. They are worth your attention. And this one had the ad-

vantage of coming from the *Eastern* European tradition, from the civilization derived from Constantinople rather than Rome and that saw the Middle Ages in terms of Byzantine saints rather than King Arthur.

The book is just *too* enigmatic and convoluted and, quite bluntly, pretentious for its own good. It purports to be a novel in the form of a lexicon, a kind of encyclopedic *Necronomicon*, which both tells the story through a series of entries and *is* the story; the story being the tangled history of the *Khazar Dictionary*, a compilation of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish accounts of the great debate in which repre-



sentatives of the three faiths tried to convert the nomadic Khazars in the 9th century. (In real history, they were the only nation ever to convert to Judaism.)

The problem is that the book is all apparatus. It is filled with endless non sequiturs, weird details, and loose ends that never do make any sense. There is no story, nothing to make it more than a jumble of bright scraps. So I can't really recommend it, although it is unique and, in its own way, interesting — except perhaps to fantasy writers, who might want to mine it for raw ore, the scattered paragraphs or even single

sentences on which whole stories might be based.

Rating: ☆☆

The C.S. Lewis Hoax
By Kathryn Lindscoog
Multnomah, 1988
175 pp., \$11.95

There's a principle in law best illustrated by the case of Oscar Wilde. The Marquis of Queensbury left a card for Wilde at Wilde's club, which read, "To Oscar Wilde, sodomite." Wilde sued for libel. Then Queensbury produced his evidence. The suit was thrown out. Charges were brought against Wilde, and he went to prison. The principle is that you shouldn't sue

THE C.S. LEWIS HOAX



KATHRYN LINDSCOOG

if the other guy can prove it. The corollary is that if the accused doesn't sue, maybe the charges are true.

Kathryn Lindscoog hasn't been sued yet, and if she isn't, this book may completely upset C.S. Lewis studies. She accuses the executor of Lewis's estate, Walter Hooper, of all manner of chicanery, not to mention outright fraud: everything from falsely representing himself as the great man's intimate friend to actually publishing forgeries of major parts of the posthumous canon in a deliberate attempt to distort our understanding of Lewis. Suspect texts include the fourth Ransom

novel, *The Dark Tower*, key letters in *They Stand Together*, and a later, adulterated edition of *The Screwtape Letters*. The mere fact that someone has written a whole book about this — and a publisher took it on — lends credence to the claims. There are also endorsements from major Lewis scholars.

Dynamite, if true. Let's wait and see.

Rating: ☆☆☆☆

Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels

By David Pringle
Carroll and Graf, 1988
224 pp., \$15.95

Fantasy: 100 Best Books

By James Cawthorn
and Michael Moorcock
Carroll and Graf, 1988
216 pp., \$15.95

These are both annotated bibliographies. You might view them as collections of short (usually two-page) essays. Pringle's choices are mostly unsurprising but sensible (the most controversial would probably be J.G. Ballard's *Crash*). He writes well, and is predictable within the confines of British criticism. I am glad to see him coming out strongly in favor of Bernard Wolfe's largely neglected *Limbo*, which he cites as "the most ambitious work of science fiction, and one of the most successful, ever to come out of America."

Cawthorn and Moorcock are more eccentric, and therefore more interesting. They're likely to lead you to worthwhile books you haven't heard of. I am only disappointed that, for all Moorcock's major emphasis on humor in fantasy as an antidote to post-Tolkien High Pomposity, he seems completely unaware of the work of Mervyn Wall, whose *Fursey* books are, I believe, among the best comic fantasies ever. Some people might debate his inclusion of Henry Treece's speculative pre-historical novels, but the authors make the defensible point that a work imagining an epoch unrecorded by history must be, in some sense, fantasy. It's a stimulating, widely reaching volume that belongs in any reference library, and it's (for once!) inex-



With a foreword by
MICHAEL MOORCOCK

pensive enough to be available to any interested fan.

Ratings: ☆☆☆ (Pringle);
☆☆☆☆ (Cawthorn/
Moorcock)

Notice to Authors:

It isn't your breath. It isn't the fact that you're an unreconstructed Reaganite. The reason that I might not have reviewed your book could be a lot simpler: I didn't get a copy. Publishers' publicity departments are notably erratic. I keep finding myself dropped from review-copy lists. Sometimes I get back on, sometimes not. Right now, the major offenders are most of the hard-cover lines except for Tor. If in future columns I seem to show a bias toward Tor books, now you know why. Of course I cannot review every book I receive, but to increase your chances, do your part by putting me on the suggested reviewer list, by bugging the publicity director, or even your editor.

□





FROM THE BOOKSHELF

By Janice M. Eisen

Outer and Inner Space

Memories of the Space Age

By J. G. Ballard
Arkham House, 1988
216 pp., \$16.95

J. G. Ballard's *Memories of the Space Age* is a collection of bizarre, beautiful, surrealistic stories that have particular meaning in these days of a moribund space program, when it seems inconceivable that 20 years ago men walked on the moon. It's a disturbing aura that Ballard has created,

A REPORT ON THE

MEMORIES OF THE SPACE AGE



J. G. BALLARD

of a doomed space program — doomed because it violates the cosmic order — and the psychotic (or are they?) people it leaves behind.

The early stories (1962-68)

Rating system

☆☆☆☆☆
☆☆☆☆
☆☆☆
☆☆
☆

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Fair
Poor

don't reflect what really happened in our own history, but that doesn't matter, because Ballard is describing an inner landscape, a metaphoric vision of reality. No, there aren't dead astronauts endlessly orbiting the earth, but there could be, and it would be fitting. For the same reason, the inconsistencies between the stories are of no consequence, as we move from the exciting early days of spaceflight to the spread of the "time plague" which forces its end.

In style, the stories vary from the straightforward plot of "A Question of Reentry" (1963) to the hallucinogenic intensity of "News from the Sun" (1981) and the title story (1982). The most moving are the first story, "The Cage of Sand" (1962), and the last, "The Man Who Walked on the Moon" (1985), which doesn't fit with the rest of the collection except in tone and feeling — and that's the focus of the book.

Ballard has given us endlessly haunting imagery, writing surreal, visionary poetry that describes our interior landscape better than any realistic fiction could do. Even the few more straightforward stories have an odd, haunting presence, a presence that grows as you proceed through the book, all the way to the last, which involves the space program only as a metaphor. J. K. Potter's art provides the perfect complement; Potter and Ballard seem made for each other.

This stunning collection is hard to describe, and even harder to forget. Ballard's people had a good reason for abandoning their dreams of spaceflight: what's ours?

July/August 1989

Rating: ☆☆☆½

The Nexus

By Mike McQuay
Bantam/Spectra, 1989
448 pp., \$4.50

"Healing powers" are a hot topic these days, what with the popularity of "New Age" ideas. *The Nexus* is a fascinating examination of what might happen if



someone really had such a power. It reads like a near-future SF thriller, though it is really a fantasy about powerful, poorly-understood psychic abilities.

Denny Stiller is a reporter for World Cable News, a network run by Ted Gayler, an older, very evil

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version of Ted Turner. In filming a story about what he assumes is one more faith-healing fraud, he is shocked to discover that the powers of Tawny Kyle and her autistic daughter Amy are real. Despite co-workers' doubts, he runs the story, and of course the Kyles are immediately besieged by the desperate. Stiller rescues them from the mobs and takes them into hiding, simultaneously protecting and exploiting them, and becoming more and more obsessed with understanding the nature and limits of this power.

Mike McQuay has tried an odd stylistic experiment: the novel is divided into "Acts" and "Scenes," and part of each Scene is written in the format of a screenplay. Though this is discomfiting at first, it



works. The technique simultaneously distances the book — the reader must make more of an effort, and visualize the characters on a TV screen instead of in reality — and makes it more immediate — things happen quickly, in the present tense, with the immediacy of movies and television. In addition, this style reflects a central point about Denny: it's not real to him unless it's on TV. It also reflects a central theme of the book: how we get our truth from TV.

The protagonist is fascinating. Denny is not terribly likable or sympathetic, but he is well thought out, and he grows during the course of the book. I also liked the portraits of his cameraman, Frank Hargrave, and of Amy, the autistic

girl. McQuay deserves a great deal of credit for his portrayal of the Rev. Jim Conover, a fundamentalist preacher who is Denny's most bitter enemy, because he is depicted as sincere in his religious beliefs; far too many SF writers use fundamentalists as easy targets by making them hypocrites. Denny's girlfriend and sometime adversary Molly Hartwell stays a little fuzzy, though, and Tawny Kyle remains flat. Ted Gayler is also one-dimensional, a pure black hat.

The plot is fast-moving, suspenseful, and logical, given the characters. A subplot about the CIA and cocaine dealing isn't well integrated, however. The ending is perhaps a little too sanguine about changing human society, but after all that happens, we (and the remaining characters) deserve a happy ending.

The novel gets preachy in spots, especially towards the end, and McQuay sometimes feels compelled to explain explicitly something that the careful reader has already understood from the characters' actions and thoughts. Overall, though, *The Nexus* is impressive and well worth reading. It makes you think about religion, and human nature, and the nature of truth.

Rating: ★★★★★

The Third Eagle: Lessons Along a Minor String
By R. A. MacAvoy
Foundation/Doubleday, 1989
312 pp., \$18.95

R. A. MacAvoy is best known for such fantasy novels as *Tea with the Black Dragon* and the *Damiano* trilogy. *The Third Eagle* marks her venture into science fiction. It is a wonderfully picturesque and detailed novel of the far future. The plot, however, is weak.

Wanbli is a Painted Wacaan, a descendant of American Indians, though the Wacaan have long forgotten those ancestors. They serve as bodyguards to the wealthy T'chishetti on the desolate world of Neunacht. Wanbli is restless, and when by a stroke of good luck he comes by the means to leave Neunacht, he wastes no time in doing so. Star-struck, he intends to

become an actor on New Benares, where three-dimensional movies are filmed. The novel traces his journey, his education in life, and his efforts to help Neunacht's dream of acquiring a "string station," which would connect it directly to other planets.

The first chapter is weak, with too much exposition, sometimes clumsily done. The rest are much better, well-written and interesting, showing us new worlds and beings without lecturing. Wanbli is a fascinating character, but I would have liked a little more insight into his character to explain why he is so different from the rest of his people. MacAvoy's sociological



invention is excellent, and I appreciate the non-Anglo-Saxon-dominated future. The creation of the "revivalists," who track down old sleeper ships, is inspired.

The Third Eagle is Dickensian in its characterization, richness of detail, and sense of place. However, it is also Dickensian in its reliance on coincidence. MacAvoy tried my patience each time things just happened to arrange themselves perfectly for Wanbli. You can get away with a couple of minor coincidences or one major one, but only Dickens could successfully prop the plot up on them.

Perhaps you can explain away the coincidences by billing this as a

legend, but it doesn't feel like one. It feels more like a coming-of-age novel — although Wanbli is older than the usual protagonists of such novels — for he is growing up, learning about the galaxy and finding his place in it. Though the plot should have been designed more carefully, on balance this is an enjoyable and interesting novel.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

Proteus Unbound

By Charles Sheffield
Del Rey, 1989
261 pp., \$3.95

Charles Sheffield has written something that's a rarity these days: a sequel that stands alone. Though I haven't read *Sight of Proteus*, I very much enjoyed its new sequel, *Proteus Unbound*. Sheffield gives us good, old-fashioned hard SF with characters made out of something with more weight and depth than cardboard.

Behrooz Wolf is a scientist, an expert on form-change equipment, which allows people to substantially alter their physical forms, within limits. As the novel opens, though, he has lost his job as the head of Earth's Office of Form Control, the woman he loves has left him, and he is suffering from recurrent hallucinations of a bizarre Dancing Man. Convinced he is going crazy, he has retreated from reality, living in a skid-row hotel hooked up to a dream machine. There he is found by Leo Manx, a Cloudlander from the Outer Solar System, who convinces him to return with him and discover why form-change machines there are malfunctioning. The malfunctions, though, turn out to be only part of a complex and deadly plot, linked not only to the future of the Inner and Outer Systems, but to Wolf's hallucinations, and his own future.

I cared about the hero and his supporting cast, though I found the villain, Black Ransome, too one-sidedly black. The plot moves along quickly and suspensefully, and those coincidences needed to make the climax work are decently justified. Ransome's plot is perhaps a little too simplistic, and we abandon a new discovery just

when we want to find out more about it; I suspect that will come in a sequel.

The author favors us with lots of intriguing ideas, especially the central one of form-change, and I believed the seemingly improbable colonization of the Oort Cloud. He does on occasion succumb to the classic hard-SF pitfall of stopping to have one character lecture — about entropy, black holes, or whatever — but these episodes are short and infrequent; Sheffield succeeds more than most hard-SF writers at showing, not telling. (It is, of course, possible that some of the things he shows, not tells, may have been lectured about in *Sight*



of *Proteus*.) Sheffield also has no lack of imagination when it comes to societal changes. I especially liked the sexual implications of watching someone eat among the Cloudlanders.

Proteus Unbound held my interest and kept me involved even through the lectures, and it brims with sense of wonder. Sheffield is definitely one of the best current practitioners of hard SF.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

Deus Ex Machina

By J. V. Brummels
Bantam/Spectra, 1989
277 pp., \$3.95

J. V. Brummels's first novel, *Deus Ex Machina*, is an impressive debut, though flawed. Brummels is a poet and it shows in his prose, although he occasionally succumbs to the tendency to overwrite. In general, this book's flaws are more in plot than in style.

The year is 2021, and the sun is going nova. (Yes, I know that's a scientific impossibility, and Brummels briefly acknowledges that by saying that it isn't exactly going nova, but he never explains what's really happening. My theory is that he wrote the book with the sun going nova and only later found out that it's the wrong type of star, so he added a couple of vague lines to indicate that something else is going on.) Since the Fall — some sort of generalized disaster in 1994, apparently brought about by Third-World wars — most of the remaining people have moved into secure New Cities, with the criminals and the misfits remaining in the suburbs. The protagonist, David Jones, is a suburban writer and pimp; the success of his book gets him involved in the Rescue Effort, an attempt to use the fledgling technology of transmutation to save a small number of people by sending them to another planet.

The plot takes a long time to get going, while Brummels constructs a picture of the society for us. It's more a mosaic than a straight line, and I found it enjoyable, but if you're looking for a traditionally-structured novel then this one is not for you. There's no real sense of building toward a climax, and I got the feeling that the author would have preferred not to have a plot at all; the story seems peripheral and unimportant, up until the very end.

I liked the characters and all the little details which give solidity to this odd future. One particularly good touch is the teen custom of speaking only in the third person; it's hard to read at first, but you get used to it, and fortunately not much of the novel is written that way. The time line at the front of the book makes me suspect that Brummels has a whole future history worked out, and perhaps he

(Continued to page 42)

At Kokomo Joe's

By Brooke Stauffer

Art by Larry Blamire

At the end of the world there's a place called Kokomo Joe's. The mud flat out front is all parked up with pickups and jeeps and Turbo-Ferrinis, and the lagoon is full of air boats and hovercraft. The scaly concrete blocks are painted a checkerboard pink-and-brown, the porch is falling down, and up on the tin roof there's a giant fish skeleton with KOKOMO JO written on it, one letter wired to each rib — the E's been missing since year one.

But inside where the smugglers and fishermen rub up against the movie stars and writers and drifters, nobody minds.

Behind the bar stands Old Joe himself. He wasn't much to look at in the first place, and time hasn't done him any favors. All up and down his left side runs an old burn. He could've had it regenerated but instead he just let it "heal" into that godawful clammy-looking scar. He's missing half a leg, and instead of getting a nice new rechargeable prosthetic he stumps around on a homemade peg leg. He's balding, and instead of getting his head regrown he shaves it. He's what they used to call middle-aged and looks it. He's short. In a world of perfectly engineered types and subtypes with hardly a hair out of place, Old Joe stands out like a wart. And it suits him. Women have been known to come from miles around — perfect A-2s and E-6s — just to sit at the bar marveling at Joe in something between fascination and disgust, and sometimes even stay after closing time, maybe to see what the rest of him looks like. Go figure it.

There's a lot of people would like to know more about Joe and a lot more that don't mind telling. And among the riffraff and high-tech high rollers, at a small table off in the corner, sit a young man and an older man. They're both good-looking, as most people are these days, the younger man a rugged C-3 California blond type, the older man a leathery F-8, more fashionable-looking than handsome and with the pale watery eyes and crinkle of red veins around his nose that not even the best esthetic engineering can disguise for long. The younger man's buying, the older man talking: about Joe.

"Like I was sayin'..." he paused long enough to drain off half his glass. "In the back there's this door reserved for special customers. His 'time machine' Joe calls it, though it ain't a time machine strictly speaking. Not a *real* time machine I mean. It don't go everywhere, you understand, it don't go anywhere

except Joe's past. But that's enough for most folks. You see back then he was in his prime, the damndest white hunter south of the equator. He didn't look the part, not with that white Irish skin and bright red hair of his (more like orange it looked) and them blue eyes and freckles. It all gave him kind of a washed-out look. And he always had on long clothes all buttoned up even on the hottest days and a big wide-brimmed hat, on account of his 'delicate skin,' he'd say laughin'. Once in a while somebody'd make the mistake of thinkin' that meant Joe was delicate, but after he'd teach 'em to listen up better there wasn't no more trouble on that account.

"Joe was always laughin'. He woke up laughin', he laughed some more for lunch, he went to bed laughin', and I'll be darned if I don't think he probably chuckled in his sleep. Joe's the laughin'est man I ever met. The only time he didn't laugh was when he was workin', trackin' game. And then he'd just smile and his eyes would be freezin' cold, he was that in-tent on what he was doin'.

"And another thing. Before you went out with Joe he'd always tell you the Rules. 'Listen up now,' he'd say. 'This big game huntin' is serious business and here's the Rules: don't get in my way, and don't touch me. It's my job to look out for tails around here, so don't you interfere with mine. I already know how my story ends.' Just like that: *I know how my story ends*. If I heard him say it once, I heard it a hundred times."

Their glasses were empty. The younger man signaled for a refill as the older man went on.

"Lemme see, where was I? Well, I'd been coming around regular for a long time, and one day Old Joe give me my own key. Didn't say nothin', just shoved it across the bar with my beer. And after a while Rowdy McNair and a coupla the other boys come over and said, 'Come on, Billy, let's see what's goin' on downstairs.' Real casual like, you know? That's all there was to it, I was IN. So we went on back to the door and they let me open it up with my key. And we went down some old shaky steps with just a little dim red light to see by, and along a hall, and we came to an old red curtain made of beads, and Rowdy went on through and we was in a cave. It was pretty dark but after a little while we could see light and we come out at the top of this long rocky hill and there's Young Joe waitin' for us at the bottom.

"And the heat." Billy mopped his forehead at the memory of it. "Boy, it was just like somebody dropped



a steam bath right on you, and by the time we clumb down over them boulders we was drippin'. But Young Joe, he was standin' there just as cool as a daisy all buttoned up to his neck with big boots and his white hat and cradlin' a gun in his arm and grinnin'. 'Welcome, boys, welcome to the jungle. Rowdy, Sam, Ray, come to see you again. And Billy,' he says real friendly. 'Don't think we've seen you in these parts before.' And then he laughed that laugh, loud and long. But he didn't shake my hand. I told you about that. *Don't touch me*, he'd always say.

"Well, then he give us each a pith helmet and a gun and he led us off into the jungle. You could see he was proud of it the way he acted, just like all the trees and rocks was old friends. There were lotsa tall shaggy palm trees and eu-ca-lyptus and them giant figs, and bamboo and vines hangin' down everywhere, and birds screechin' and monkeys chatterin' and now and again you'd hear a elephant far off or a monstrous roar like a lion or tiger, and away off through the trees you could just barely see these dark purplish mountains. It was just like some old Tarzan movie only it was all kinda flatter than you'd expect, because of the boys."

"The boys?" the younger man asked.

"Yeah, the bearers, the *natives* you might say. Tell you the truth I didn't even notice 'em at first, they was so quiet and unassuming-like, just comin' along behind with the gear. But after a long time we stopped for a rest and Joe calls out, 'N'goombah, bring us some beer,' and this little fella like a trash can on wheels rolls up outta nowhere with a six-pack balanced on his head. And it was still cold, too!

"We had good huntin' that day. I didn't hit nothin' but Joe got a big Cape buffalo and Rowdy bagged a leopard, and by the time the boys skinned 'em it was time to head back. For a shortcut Joe took us by way of this river. We waded across holdin' our rifles over our heads to keep 'em dry, and the boys floatin' along right behind us in these things like life rings that popped out from around their middles automatic-like. Well, just as we're gettin' near the far side we hear this terrible scream: 'Bwana Joe! Help!' It was N'tosho and a monstrous big croc's got him, wavin' him around like a flag. Before you could even think, Joe whips down his rifle and shoots standin' there chest-deep in the river. He shot that croc right between the eyes and it went down quick. We never did find N'tosho, the current was mighty strong there. Piranhas prob'ly got him. And he was carryin' Rowdy's leopard skin, too."

Here Billy paused thoughtfully and took a long pull at his beer.

"The boys stuck closer after that, I don't mind tellin' you, but we didn't have no more trouble. We went out lots more after that and good days they was too, just strollin' along in the jungle with Joe laughin' and sniffin' out the game. It was always hot, so blazin' hot that after a while you sorta got used to it, but there weren't no bugs or poisonous snakes or anything that could creep up on you unawares, you might say. You always had a fair shake in Joe's jungle, and Joe laughin' fit to knock down the coconuts. Except when he got wind of some game. And then he'd creep along

so quiet you couldn't hear him in a closet. He didn't hardly ever miss, did Young Joe."

Billy waved expansively around the bar. "Look at all them trophies."

The walls bristled with antlers and racks and the snarling masks of predators, savage and mysterious in the sanguine gloom. The head of an enormous Cape buffalo frowned down above the mantel cut from a ship's timber, its horns like a great grim mustache in the flickering firelight.

"There ain't that many of 'em that's mine," said Billy, "but I got the lion over there."

The younger man followed his finger. Nailed to the wall was a three-legged lion skin.

"Course it took me a few shots," Billy said with an embarrassed cough, "and I kinda spoiled the off leg there." He stared down into his beer.

"So there's a whole secret jungle behind the secret door," the younger man said with a half smile. He was getting his money's worth.

"Not anymore," Billy muttered deep in his glass, and set it down empty. "I ain't finished the story."

"We went along like that for a long time, huntin' near every day. And I don't know where Joe got his game or where it come from, but after a while the pickin's got slim, like the jungle was being depopulated. You could see it was workin' on Joe, hurtin' his prestige-like. He always liked to show you a good time, and besides, what good's a White Hunter when there ain't nothin' to hunt? Joe, he stopped talkin' near altogether (and he never said that much anyway) and he didn't even laugh much, just smiled kinda grim."

"One afternoon we was headed back to the cave. Out all day and hadn't seen nothin' to shoot at, not even a buzzard. The boys was singin' low and mournful and Joe was way out in front, when suddenly he stiffens up like a bird dog! There was rhino tracks leading off into the bush right where it's thickest!

"Well sir, we was all walkin' on eggs now, even Joe. You couldn't see nothin' but you knew that somewhere in that thicket there was a rhino waitin', maybe lookin' back at us, and in case he decided to come out we didn't want to get in his way. Joe sent the boys forward to scout around. They could roll real quiet when they had to and they didn't have no smell, leastways not a smell that seemed to bother animals. Joe waved us to keep outta sight and then real careful he began moving up on the thicket himself. He was movin' slow, creepin' from bush to bush and keepin' under cover, when all of a sudden he flushes a pheasant! I tell you that bird shot up under his nose like a rocket and them wings was goin' like a set of drums!

"Rowdy McNair was off to the right with a shotgun, and before you could say *boo* he up and shoots the bird. Then things start to happen real fast: suddenly the rhino comes chargin' out of the brush like an express train straight at Joe. Joe jumps up fast to shoot and trips over a tree root. Rowdy sees what he done and goes to help Joe — what he thought he was gonna do, club that rhino to death with a shotgun, I don't know. Anyway he runs over and tries to help Joe up and Joe, he just ROARS!

"I can still see it: Joe with his foot caught in the

root and that fool Rowdy standin' over him brandishin' that empty shotgun, the rhino comin' at 'em like a volcano, and that never-endin' sunshine stabbin' down through the palm trees."

"What did you do?" asked the younger man.

"Do?" Billy stared at him for a simpleton. "Me and Sam and Ray legged it outta there as fast as we could! Ain't you been listenin' to what I say? The fool interfered! He touched Joe! I tell you we scrambled up them rocks and into the cave in a hurry and we just got through the curtain in the nick o' time! 'Cause there was Old Joe himself comin' down the stairs double quick, mutterin' to himself as he chambered a shell in his .458 Winchester Magnum. I tell you we flattened against the wall as he went by but I don't think he even saw us, he was that mad. Then Old Joe went on out through the curtain and we got outta there fast."

Billy paused to wet his whistle; the younger man ordered him another one. "And then what happened?" he asked.

"Well, Kokomo Joe's was closed next day, first time anybody could remember. But day after that it was open again and Old Joe the same as ever, except for he was missin' that leg. But the door was all closed up with boards nailed across it and a little cardboard sign saying 'Closed For Alterations.'

"Then one day the boards was took down. I'd come in right at opening time that day and had a beer and shot the shit with Old Joe.

"Alterations all done?" I said, real innocent. Joe just smiled. He never was talkative, Old Joe.

"Change the lock too?" I asked him.

"Same old lock as always," he said and set me up again..."

The younger man interrupted. "Wait a minute — back in the jungle — whatever happened to Rowdy McNair?"

"Old Rowdy?" Billy laughed and jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "That's him on the wall up there!"

The younger man looked, and sure enough — stuck up in the corner between a gazelle and a leopard was the snarling head of a man: red-faced and blustery, with a mustache like a wire brush. And he still looked mad.

He made a choking noise and gulped his beer. For a while they drank in silence. Then Billy went on.

"A little later Sam and Ray come in and we went back to have a look for ourselves. There was the steps same as ever and that old red curtain at the bottom. But no cave, it was gone. Instead when we come through the curtain we was in a big shed, like a warehouse all fulla nautical-looking junk. There was coils of rope, a coupla anchors, boots and rain slickers and nets, a lot of 55-gallon drums and a sail lyin' rolled up in the corner. There wasn't no windows, just a kinda hatch or skylight opened up in the roof, and it was dim and shady and smelled, you know, like boats, like oil and docks and old wet canvas and ropes. There was a door off to the other end and right over it like a moosehead there's this big old shark's jawbone, bleached white and just a-grinnin' death. You could hear noises outside and when we went out we was on a dock. There was a crowd of seagulls screechin' and

divin' all around the dock and right there in the middle was Joe, throwin' handfuls of chum up in the air and watchin' 'em grab it up quick as he could throw it. And there beside the dock's this big good-lookin' boat, with *Birdy* painted on the bow in bright blue letters.

"*Birdy*," Billy laughed. "Now ain't that a hell of a name for a fishin' boat?"

"Did you ask him where it came from?" the younger man asked.

"You didn't ask Joe nothin'. But once a long time later when the engine broke down he took off his coat to fix it and I seen a tattoo on his arm, a naked lady with *Birdy* written under her and all surrounded with hearts and flowers and cur-leecues.

"But that was later. Anyway, we come out of the shed and there he was feedin' them birds and laughin' loud as ever. He looked a little bit older, kinda grizzled like you might say, but 'cept for that he was still the same old Young Joe. He had on a big old peacoat buttoned most the way up and a red bandanna wrapped around his neck, and a captain's hat kinda leanin' over his eye and his pants (they was yellow) stuffed into a big rubber boot on one side and rolled up over his peg leg on the other. And he had gold rings on his fingers and he'd grown himself a bushy red beard. All he needed was a eye patch and a knife in his teeth and he'd of looked like a reg'lar pirate."

Billy quit talking long enough to finish his beer and call for more.

"And it was all blue sea and bright sky as far as you could see, not a cloud anywhere, and the *Birdy* all gleaming new red and yellow paint. Pretty as a picture it all was and Joe just a-laughin' and the gulls eatin' out of his hand.

"Well, Cap'n Joe," I says, 'seems like you're in a new line of work.'

"That's right, Billy," he says laughin'. 'Big game huntin' seemed a mite strenuous for a man with a game leg, so I've gone into the tarpon business, where there ain't so much walkin' around.'

"And then he turned to *Birdy* and waved his hat an' durned if the boat didn't pipe us aboard just like admirals or somethin', all by herself! Then she give the lines a shake, cast herself off and we was sailin', sailin' over the boundin' main. And what a day! The waves was twinklin' in the sunshine and there was flyin' fish around the bow thick as crickets. Once one of 'em jumped too high and landed on deck. I went to throw it back but then I seen it was busted open an' there was wires and things sticking out of the hole. A robot fish, who'd of thought it? But there was *real* ones too! We caught some sharks an' stripers and threw 'em back, and a dolphin all green and blue and streaked with yella, and a tarpon near as long as the boat, so big we had to use the winch for a fishin' pole! Biggest fish I ever seen but that *Birdy* didn't hardly even lean over when we hooked him, course you'd expect that on Joe's boat in Joe's ocean. And all the time he was playing that fish Joe just stood there by the rail talkin' quiet, like to himself, and the boom would swing from port to starboard and the drum'd take up the slack and then he'd whisper 'ahead slow' and *Birdy* would speed up or slow down, all by herself. There weren't no crew. But then that was Joe's way, he

always had style.

"Finally we got the tarpon secured and come on back, and that's the skeleton what he's usin' up on the roof for a sign. Well me and the boys gone out time and time again after that. And the weather was always dazziin' perfect and never a speck of land or another boat in sight anywheres, we had it all to ourselves. An' Joe laughin', always laughin'. That one time like I said *Birdy* broke down but even that seemed planned, like window dressin' you might say, just so's we could watch Joe fix it while *Birdy* served us up a few cold ones automatic-like, and admire the engine room. And clean? You could eat off the floor, and all the engine an' pipes painted up green and blue and the brasswork shinin' like flashlights.

"Well, sir." Billy looked surprised to find his glass empty, belched, and waved for another beer. "Things went along that way for a long time, and happy times they was too, fishin' all day and rememberin' all night here at Kokomo Joe's.

"And then one night a new boy come along, young kid kinda like you. He come up one night on a big chopper, and then he come back the next night and every night after that. Called himself Split, and Old Joe took a likin' to him. He'd been around too, you could see that. So one night Joe give him his own key, and next day we was all down to the dock early. Joe, he was proud to be showin' off *Birdy* to an appreciative audience, and we all went down to the below decks to see the engines. Like the Mardi Gras it looked, all colorful and shinin'.

"Now one thing about Joe. He don't hold much with smokin'. He could drink any man under the table I ever seen, one leg or two, but I never seen him touch tobacco 'cept maybe a pinch o' snuff on Christmas and his birthday. Me and the boys know that, Split of course he don't, nobody'd told him. Also Split never heard the Rules. Joe would of got to that, like I said he always told a new fella the Rules before he took him out the first time, so there wouldn't be no misunderstandin' like. But we wasn't out yet, you understand. We're still just sitting at the dock and Joe's bustin' to show off *Birdy* to the kid.

"So there's Joe showing off the engines all shined and painted like a Easter egg. New painted they was, purple and white. Well Joe he sticks his head up through the hatch and whistles for *Birdy* to fire 'em up, and just then the kid pulls a Camel out of his pocket and fires it up and tosses the match down on the floor. It lands in a pile of old paint rags and *FOOM*, the place goes up. Joe's standin' there right over this pile of rags and Split sees what he done and says 'Jesus' and grabs Joe to pull him out of the way.

"Well, that done it. Me and the boys don't wait around to see what happens next, we light outta there like we was on fire. I yell to the kid to come on. Joe's lyin' in the corner, he hit his head or somethin' and the engine room's goin' up like fury, but of course Split don't know what the danger is, he's stompin' around on them rags while the fire blazes up the woodwork.

"Well, we get up on deck and make it to the shed. I trip on a coil of rope and pick myself up fast and I'm the last one through. I was sweatin' I'll tell you, but I got past the curtain just in time: here comes Old Joe

stumpin' down them stairs as fast as he can manage on that peg leg, and he's got an ax. I drop down flat on the floor as he comes by and he damn near tripped over me and was I glad he didn't, and he went on through the curtain swearin' and wavin' that ax and I got upstairs here as fast as I could."

Billy stopped to drain off the last of his beer. There was a far-away look in his eyes.

"What happened then?" asked the younger man.

Slowly Billy came back and looked him in the eye. "Well, Kokomo Joe's was closed up tight for a long time, then one day Old Joe was back, with his ear half burned off and that scar all along his side there. The door was shut up again with that same little 'Closed For Alterations' sign. And he'd took down the mirror over the bar and put up the No Smokin' sign."

No need to ask which sign he meant; it was the first thing you saw when you walked in the door, twenty-five feet of blinking red neon script soaring and swooping from one end of the scarred mahogany bar to the other. *No Smoking!*

The younger man set another beer in front of Billy. "What about Split?" he asked.

"Nobody ever saw 'im again," Billy mumbled into the foam. "But if you ask me I'd guess that there yurn yonder holds whatever's left of the mortal re-mains of friend Split." He nodded toward the bar. There among the bright ranks of bottles ranged along the wall was a small square ceramic jar of vaguely Chinese appearance, the kind of thing your mother would pick up at an airport gift shop full of hard candies or bath salts. It stood on a little shelf all by itself winking on and off in the light of the No Smoking sign, a pale rose color with greenish decorations and a piece of torn black crepe paper taped to the front of it.

In a long gulp Billy polished off his beer and slumped down in his chair. One leg or two he was half-stupefied, and the younger man wondered how to keep him awake. Automatically he began to shake out a smoke, then thought better of it. In the other pocket he had a pack of gum. He pulled it out and extended it across the table. "Want some?"

Slowly Billy extracted a slice and popped it in his mouth, silver paper and all. He chewed thoughtfully. After a while the younger man asked, "Sign ever come down?"

"Yup," Billy answered after a longer while. "An' we went down them same stairs, with that same piddly lightbulb, an' it was cold, boy."

There was a pause.

"Cold," the younger man prompted.

"Yup. Freezin' cold an' everythin' was orange and there wasn't hardly enough room for the three of us."

"Where were you?"

"In the tent! Didn't I just say that! A orange tent and it was freezin' and you couldn't hardly stand up noways!"

Billy was moving slow now, but with much prompting and prodding this was how the story continued:

"There was these big jackets and furry gloves and electric boots lyin' there on the floor and we put 'em on quick. Just then we hear this terrible snarl'n' and



snappin' noise and we peek out through the flap kinda cautious-like, and here's these three giant husky dogs all fightin' over a piece of meat or somethin'. They was growlin' and bitin' and goin' at it like fury and I tell you I didn't much feel like goin' out there and interruptin' 'em, but just then up comes this fella in a fur coat with a club and he just wades right into the middle of them dogs. He's layin' about him left and right and makin' more noise than all them dogs put together. Well, two of 'em turns tail and scatters right away but the biggest one, he musta been the leader of the pack, he turns on the stranger and jumps at him, goin' for the throat. Well, sir, he was cool, I give him that, he just steps back outta the way and as the husky goes flyin' past he lets loose with the club and caught him right behind the ear. You couldn't of drove a golf ball any neater than he hit that dog. The husky just kept sailin' through the air and when he come down and hit the snow he kinda crumpled up into a snowball and went rollin' off down the hill, and the faster it rolled the bigger it got till finally it fell off the edge of this prec-i-pice like, and it was so big it made a noise like a avalanche.

"The stranger, he just stood there watchin' it go and when it was all over he throws off his hood and laughs and the laugh come echoin' back from the mountains that was all around and then we reco'nized him. It was Joe!

"We all come crowdin' out of the tent as quick as we could and then we seen it's a reg'lar camp. There was some other tents and a pile of stuff with a tarp over it and a buncha huskies lyin' in the snow in the lee of the supplies-like, an' a big old sled.

"Well, we was all excited and talkin' at once and sayin', 'What's goin' on here, Joe?' Joe just smiled and said, 'Well boys, whiles I was outta circulation I read in this magazine 'bout a fella born with no legs who took up mountain climbin'. I figured if he could do it with two art-i-ficial pins I'd make out like a champ with my one stump here. An' besides, fishin' seemed kinda tame for an active fella like me once I got the hang of it.' Then he laughed that laugh again and it went rollin' around the mountains and we was laughin' right along with him an' even the dogs looked up and wagged their tails.

"Then he said, 'Now this here's a extinct volcano never before been climbed by civilized man, an' you boys are just in time. You're all civilized ain't you?' He looked real serious for a minute, then he winked. 'Don't mind the snow, it's nice an' warm up top. You hurry up an' I'll cook your lunch in a geyser an' then you can have a ja-cuzzi bath in one of them hot springs up there.' He was grinnin' ear to ear like a kid at Christmas. Then he bends over and picks up this rope layin' in the snow. It was bright orange and went away right straight up the side of that there volcano, higher and higher and higher till you couldn't see it no more for the clouds. I mean it went way up there. So Joe picks up the rope and says, 'Hook yourselves on, boys, an' we'll be up in time for lunch.'"

Here there was a longer pause than usual. Finally the younger man asked, "So how was it?"

Billy looked as if he didn't know quite how to begin. He fidgeted with his empty glass, took out his

gum (still flecked with bits of paper) and stuck it under the edge of the table, took a deep breath and said, "You know, boy, I don't mind most things, but me and heights never really got along. Trees, ladders, ropes, I never liked none of 'em, and there wasn't nothin' to like about that volcano that I could see.

"Everybody else was ready to go and Joe looks at me real casual and says: 'Comin', Billy?' and I say back real casual: 'Think I'll sit this one out, Joe.' 'Sure, Billy,' he says, 'whatever you like.' But he wasn't smilin' no more. Then they started climbin' and I went back in the tent and took off my cold-weather duds. When I got upstairs here Old Joe looked at me so disgusted I thought he was gonna take away my key. But he didn't and since then I just been hangin' around, waitin' for the wind to change like you might say."

The younger man opened his mouth to speak, but right then things started to happen fast:

— A fire bell clanged.

— The No Smoking sign began to blink on and off.

— Old Joe dropped a bottle of scotch and vaulted the bar, a coil of rope in one hand and a dozen sticks of dynamite in the other.

— Billy yelled, "Holy shit!" and jumped to the tabletop.

And Kokomo Joe's came alive like a stomped ant-hill. There were people running out the door and jumping through the windows, and a few who ran after Old Joe himself. The young man jumped up and started after these as Billy stood on the table, whipping from side to side and sniffing the air like a dog trying to place a scent. He'd nearly reached the door to the back premises when suddenly Billy leaped from the table and caught him in a flying tackle; they went down together in a clatter of beer bottles and chairs.

"Not that way, you young fool!" Billy shouted. "We got to get out and get out quick!" He hauled the younger man to his feet and led him half-stunned out the front door. As they stumbled down the dilapidated steps the windows behind suddenly blazed and a hot wind roared through the door and lifted them like leaves.

When they picked themselves out of the mud Kokomo Joe's was blazing like a Roman candle, great gobbets of fire spurring out the roof and through the windows. As the eruption devoured the walls the tin roof collapsed into the devastation, glowed red for a moment, and disappeared. Last of all the giant fish skeleton settled into the molten lava and was consumed. Another flow of lava spilled hissing into the lagoon and set it boiling. And then as they watched spellbound, the cone of the volcano emerged from the boiling lagoon and rose skyward, a ball of fire wreathed in a mushroom cloud of steam and fume.

"Holy mother o' God," Billy breathed, and if it was a prayer it worked. For as the volcano grew before them, lava rolled to the very edge of what had been the porch at their feet and there it stopped, fading quickly from angry crimson to dead gray. And though flaming cinders and house-sized boulders rained death on every side, none fell near them. It was like having ringside seats at the Creation. Already the

top of the cone was lost in the darkness of its own making, as a pall of black smoke spread quickly from horizon to horizon, blotting out the pale beginnings of dawn.

Then suddenly it erupted with a heart-stopping violence that dwarfed everything that had gone before. Instinctively the two men clung to each other and stood open-mouthed as celestial fireworks flared across the sky. Which was why they didn't immediately notice the figure walking toward them out of a smoking fissure in the volcano's side. The younger man saw it first. "Hey, Billy," he cried, shaking his shoulder, "get a load of this!"

"What the hell..." Billy began.

The mysterious stranger looked rather like an astronaut in a bulky reflective suit with dark faceplate and breathing apparatus. He had a large reflective bundle under his arm. Notwithstanding the fireproof suit he approached slowly, picking his way with care across the still-smoking lava; ten feet away he stopped and swept back the hood of his suit with a single motion of his free hand.

Before them stood a chunky young man, not too tall, with fine pale skin and hair the color of carrots, and a smile like Teddy Roosevelt about to have Cuba for breakfast. Billy took one look at him, opened his mouth to speak, couldn't, and suddenly sat down hard on the ground. At which point the stranger threw back his head and laughed. And what a laugh — for a moment even the roar of the volcano was stilled! Even the younger man knew who it was now.

"Joe," said Billy, his voice cracking with emotion. "Joe, is it really you?"

"Of course it's me, you old fool," he replied. "Who else would come back through fire and death just to save your worthless hide?" And he laughed again, and the sound was as strange in that time and place as a string quartet in a charnel house.

"But Joe," said Billy, looking at him more closely, "you ain't burned no more, nor all cut up neither. An' you're so young, younger'n I ever seen you before." His voice was full of wonder.

"I know, Billy," he replied, shaking his head slowly from side to side. "All them years I thought I knew how my story ended, and damn if it ain't startin' all over again! And not only that," he continued, "there's gold in them thar hills." He opened his hand and there in the palm of the fireproof glove gleamed a gold nugget the size of a hen's egg.

At this, the younger man spoke up for the first time. "Now wait a minute," he said suspiciously. "Who ever heard of finding gold in a volcano?"

"Who ever heard of any of this?" Joe roared back. "But there it is plain as life, and there's plenty more where that come from for them as got the grit to go after it! So what d'you say boys, are you with me?"

Billy was back up on his feet in a flash. "I'm with you, Joe," he said. "I'd follow you to hell and back."

"Me too," added the younger man after a moment.

"I sincerely hope that ain't gonna be necessary," Joe chuckled. "But just in case, I brought along some protection. 'Here,'" he said, unfurling his gleaming bundle. "I think these two is just about your sizes."

As he was checking out his suit, something suddenly seemed to occur to Billy. "Say Joe," he asked in a tentative voice, "just how fur up is it to this here gold, anyway?"

"Pretty far, but easy climbin'."

"No ropes?" he asked anxiously.

"No ropes," Joe promised. "We'll be walking all the way."

That was good enough for Billy; he began suiting up right away.

The younger man was having trouble with his. "Here," Joe said, "them zippers up the back is tricky. Lemme give you a hand."

The effect of this helpful gesture on Billy was electrifying:

"JOE!" he cried. "You *touched* the kid!"

"Yeah, so?" said Joe indistinctly (he was having some trouble with the zippers himself, now).

Billy stood there with his silver suit half-on and half-off, arms crossed stubbornly across his chest; a flaming rock the size of a jeep landed six feet away and he didn't even flinch. "Well, I guess I seen everythin' now," he said. "An' I think maybe it's time you told us the Rules for this here little jaunt."

"The Rules?" said Joe, looking up.

"That's right," Billy said doggedly. "I ain't follerin' you up the side of no active volcano without I know the Rules first!"

Joe grinned at him. "I don't know the Rules yet, Billy, this is a brand new game. We'll just have to make 'em up as we go along!"

A few minutes later they began picking their way up the side of the volcano; they went in single file with Joe leading. "Mind where you walk, now," he called back over his shoulder. "These suits is only rated for 2000 degrees!" □

Our Next Issue:

A small and struggling colony of humans in near-Earth orbit fights the effects of solar radiation and a severe shortage of potable water in Bill Johnson's novelette "A Matter of Thirst" in our Sept.-Oct 1989 issue. Bill will be joined by Larry Niven in his second appearance with "The Portrait of Daryanree the King," and Walter Jon Williams with "The Bob Dylan Solution." Also among the crew will be Patricia Anthony with "Belief Systems," Tom Easton, who will provide the issue's gonzo SF story with "Sing a Song of Porkchops," and David Ludwig with "Made for Each Other." Robert A. Metzger will give you a glimpse of some *really* alien life in his science column, and we'll have our usual reviews and features. □

Burn So Bright

By Robert A. Metzger

Art by David Deitrick

The Swan was my favorite, always had been, and if Furnace Hole managed to survive to the next year I imagined that it would be once again. Millions would have come inside to see it if they'd been allowed, but of course that wasn't about to happen. The damned Aliens wouldn't let anyone in, and that was that. They weren't interested in outsiders, not when they had the fifty-nine inhabitants of Furnace Hole to poke and prod at. Hell, you couldn't as much as sneak around the back of Gaffer's filling station to take a piss without one of those rotten-egg-smelling tentacle-thumpers sticking out a beaker and trying to collect it before it could disappear into the desert sand.

High noon, and I had finally removed the last tarp from the last of the ice sculptures — a miniature Fort Alamo, complete with a translucent Davy Crockett cracking the clear ice stock of his rifle across the shimmering head of a Mexican soldier. I took several steps back, moving out of the dirt of Barker Street, and stepped up onto the wood walk in front of Sharpey's Tavern and Ammo Shop. Standing in the building's shadow, I really didn't feel any cooler. Today was going to be a real back-burner, maybe up to 110. A gust of wind, carrying red sand and dead mesquite leaves, suddenly beat against the side of my face. The banner that had been dangling like a limp rag from the radio mast of the sheriff's office snapped to attention. It blazed in yellows and reds against the empty blue sky.

"Sixth Annual Ice Festival — Furnace Hole, Nevada, August Twenty-Second," I read aloud.

"Not the same, Hank."

I turned. Old Tom Thunderbolt had snuck up on me. His ancient Goshute Indian face looked like a slab of sun-dried venison. His eyes were as open as they ever got, but the obsidian glint of his pupils was barely visible.

"The Swan's the best," I said to him.

He ran a scarred and calloused three-fingered hand through his long, steel-gray hair. "Not like the ones from the city," he said.

When Tom said *city*, what he really meant was Las Vegas. The only ice sculpture that Furnace Hole could actually call its own was the Swan, carved by Tom himself. All the rest had been shipped in last night from Vegas, packed in dry ice, and sculpted by supposedly the greatest artists from throughout the

world. At the head of Barker Street, a replica of the Eiffel Tower rose almost forty feet into the hot air, while at the other end of the street loomed an equally tall icy likeness of Karl Marx. In between sat the works commissioned by almost fifty countries. It had taken ten of us all night and the better part of this morning just to set them up.

"They've got no soul, not like yours," I said to Tom. "They could have all been spit out of the same giant ice-sculpting machine." I pointed to the Swan. "But when I look at yours, I can see the man who carved it." Walking back into the street, I moved toward the Swan. I could feel Tom at my back and smell the whiskey that the hot sun forced through his pores. The Swan was by far the smallest of all the ice sculptures, having been carved from a single block. It was less than a foot tall, and its body was flecked with countless chips and nicks. An entire half-inch length of its beak had already snapped off, and deep within it, going from tail feathers to breast, ran a jagged crack. But the long neck was glass smooth, delicate and fragile-looking. The eyes, twin chips of turquoise, sparkled. It sat in a turkey-basting pan that was already filled with a quarter of an inch of melt water. The Swan would be the first to go, probably in less than an hour because of this heat. And I think it was because of that, because it would only be here for a matter of minutes, that I liked it best of all. The rest of these icy behemoths would probably last for days.

Tom stood next to me, staring up at a nearly life-sized icy replica of Santa Claus and a team of prancing reindeer. "Not like the old days," said Tom, kicking at a dried clod of horse manure.

I looked back at the Swan. A drop of water clung at the tip of its fractured beak. "Nothing much is," I whispered.

Furnace Hole had no reason for existing other than the fact that there was fifty miles of nothing between Tonopah and Warm Springs. It was the perfect spot for a gas station, a bar, and a curio shop that sold stuffed Gila monsters and Indian arrowheads. That was back in the early '40s. But after the war, with radiators that didn't seem quite so prone to boiling over, and most traffic skirting south to go through Vegas, the gas station was boarded up, and Furnace Hole itself might have simply blown away into the desert. What saved the little town was that it was situated at



the nearest crossroads adjacent to the northern border of the Nellis Bombing and Gunnery range. Soldiers, Washington types, and newspaper people would swarm into town whenever anything nuclear was blasted down at Yucca Flats. The local economy boomed, swelling the population five-fold, from ten to fifty-two.

My parents, Henry and Mabel Matheson, arrived in '64. It had not been in their plans to make Furnace Hole their home, but when their pickup, bound for California, died three miles outside of town, the choice was made for them. Dad became the night bartender at Sharpey's, and Mom worked at keeping the desert out of the tarpaper-and-cinder-block bungalow that they lived in. I arrived in the spring of '71, killing Mom in the process. For me, life was Furnace Hole, a twice-a-day bus ride to and from Tonopah for schooling, and the occasional newspaper interview wanting a kid's opinion about fallout, the Russian Menace, and the details as to how severely my house rattled during the last atomic blast.

By the early '80s, however, blowing up bombs no longer drew the crowds like it once had. So Furnace Hole, with its very survival at stake, looked for a new angle. That was how the Furnace Hole Ice Festival was born. The first year, there were free snowcones, a fort built out of ice blocks that covered the entire entrance of Barker Street, the Swan carved by Tom Thunderbolt, and a carnival complete with a three-story Ferris wheel brought all the way in from Bakersfield, California. I was twelve that year, probably the best year of my life. The Ice Festival drew them in from Vegas and Ely, and we even got a couple of busloads of Mormons from Cedar City, Utah.

The first year was the best, with each subsequent year finding that Furnace Hole had died a little since the previous festival, looking a little shabbier, and being a little more wind-worn. Each year fewer and fewer people came. Dad died just before last year's festival from what the coroner said was a heart attack. But I think it was just the desert and the heat that had finally burned him out. He was forty-seven, but had looked an exhausted sixty. I moved into the back of the filling station and pumped gas after school and on the weekends.

Last year's festival looked like it would be the end of it. The carnival hadn't come for the previous two years, and the ice house broke down only three days before the start of the festival. That year's festivities consisted of a three-foot-tall igloo and Tom's ice Swan. Twenty-seven people showed up. Then, just before nightfall, just as the Swan was crumbling into the turkey pan, and some teenagers from Vegas had totaled the igloo with a stick of dynamite, the Aliens arrived.

There were no glowing lights, no flying saucers, not even roaring rocket engines. One instant, people had been milling around the street, a few chasing the kids who had just destroyed the igloo, and the next, the Aliens were there. I was one of the few to actually see them arrive. Right next to the rusted-out propane tank by the filling station, the air had shimmered and distorted. I had only noticed it because a disintegrating Volkswagen Bug that had been up on

blocks for almost a decade began to sway in the still, hot air. Then the air itself suddenly opened. Rainbow streamers poured out from a black nothingness, and Aliens began crawling out. By the time the last of them had come through, 'most everyone had fled. But I'd seen it all, and even counted them as they crawled out single file. There were 112 of them, almost two for every man, woman and child who lived in Furnace Hole.

They were all about the same size and shape, like a good-sized octopus, but dressed in aluminum foil. They wore glass helmets, and their heads were little more than gray lumps of flesh with a large, yellow, parrot-like beak stuffed right in the center. Even in their suits they smelled like rotten eggs and sulfur.

I was the first to talk to them. Actually, I've been the only one to talk to them. They spoke perfect English, with a soft Southern accent. Two of them sort of crawled up to me, since I was still standing on the exact same spot as when I had first seen them. I can remember it as if it had happened only an instant ago.

"Is this the fifth annual Ice Festival of Furnace Hole, Nevada?" the nearer of the two asked politely. The voice seemed to come not so much from it as from the air around it. The yellow parrot beak hadn't moved.

I managed a nod and pointed into the street. What remained of the igloo was splintered and scattered about, and the Swan was nothing more than ice chunks floating in the turkey pan.

The Alien looked around, then waved its tentacles to those behind it. They all waved back, and then, chirping to one another, thumped at the ground.

"We're too late," it said in a voice full of sorrow.

Again I nodded.

"We'll wait, then."

"Wait?" I managed to ask.

"For the sixth annual Ice Festival of Furnace Hole, Nevada," it answered.

And that's exactly what they did. They waited, and they watched all of us in Furnace Hole. An invisible barrier materialized around the town. They controlled what went through. Food, medical supplies, clothing, and fuel came in. Nothing and no one went out. We weren't even prisoners, more like microbes wedged between pieces of glass, specimens for the Aliens to study. Presidents, dictators, and Secretaries General meant nothing to them. All they wanted to do was wait for the sixth annual Ice Festival and study those who lived in Furnace Hole.

Even if they weren't interested in the outside world, we certainly were. As the world crept by for us inside, one agonizingly slow day at a time, from TV sets we watched the outside world go insane. The Aliens were the straw that broke the world's back. The Soviets' paranoia flared as they claimed the United States had captured the Aliens and was forcing them to divulge military secrets. The result was three green glass craters where Tokyo, Leningrad and Miami had once stood. The Middle East from Teheran to Tripoli was biologically barren, and more than a billion people across the world had starved to death. The entire world held its breath, praying that it would survive

until it was time for the Furnace Hole Sixth Annual Ice Festival.

The Aliens had spoken only one other time, and that had also been on the day of their arrival. After the first one told me they would wait and then crawled away, the second one came nearer and pushed itself up tall, standing on the tips of its tentacles. It moved its head to within only inches of my face.

I couldn't move. I couldn't even breathe.

"You burn so bright," it said with an awe-filled voice. It then lowered itself back down and crawled away after the first one. It was the last time any of them spoke to us.

Tom had his large flat nose thrust up into the air. "They're coming."

I could smell them, too. The Aliens camped at the outskirts of town, popping back and forth from Furnace Hole to wherever they had originated. They'd be hitting Barker Street at the far end, down by the Eiffel Tower. Even as I looked down the street, a cloud of dust rose upward, and I could see the glitter of aluminum foil.

"What will they do when today's over?" asked Tom.

I had turned eighteen last month, hardly more than a kid. But in many ways I had become both mayor and leader of Furnace Hole. I was the one who talked to the press and the authorities by pushing up to the barrier and shouting through. All this had happened because on that first day I had been the one they had spoken to. That had somehow made me the world authority on the Aliens. Everyone both inside and outside thought I understood what they were doing and why they were doing it. I knew as little as everyone else.

"It's hard to tell, Tom," I said, trying to sound noncommittal. The world was holding its breath, waiting to see what would happen today. It was my opinion that, no matter what actually took place in Furnace Hole, by nightfall the world would flash into a crimson ball of flame. There were just too many maniacs across the world with their fingers on the button. It would take only one to crack under the pressure.

"They're not stopping," said Tom.

And they weren't. The ice sculptures had been sent from countries around the world in some feeble attempt to please the Aliens, with the hope that they'd save our asses before we blew ourselves apart. Apparently the Aliens were unimpressed. They crawled and squirmed down the street as if the sculptures weren't even there.

Tom and I backed up out of the street and onto the porch of Sharpey's Tavern. They moved closer, what had to be all 112 of them. None of Furnace Hole's citizens was on the street. They were all either packed into Sharpey's, knocking back ice-cold beers as they nervously paced between the bar and the open front door, or huddled around the front window inside the sheriff's station. They knew that something was going

(Continued to page 40)

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Bluebonnets

(Continued from page 4)

She follows the rococo cleaning bot down the hall. In the third room her mother is waiting.

"Mama?" she calls.

Her mother doesn't look up. She's staring out the windows into the green of the lawns. The rest home is an expensive place to buy time, and it has all the amenities of the rich: open spaces where nothing at all happens.

Nothing is happening on the lawn. A few old people, bright umbrellas over them, have been set out to bake in the spring heat. Three bots, generic models, stand by to move the umbrellas as if they were mechanical daisies tracking the sun.

"Is it raining?" her mother asks. Fingers like dry twigs lie uneasily in her lap.

"No. It's not raining. Mama, listen. Mars Colony wants to take me. But they won't take you."

Mama never takes her eyes off the lawn. "Nurse?"

"No, Mama. I'm Lou."

Mama's vague blue gaze rises to focus on some spot just past Lou's shoulder. "Nurse?"

"Maybe you know me better as Tina Louise. I always hated that name."

Mama smiles. Her pink skin is transparent with age and it shows painfully through the thinning white hair. If the government would wait, the problem would solve itself. A little while longer and her mother would be invisible. "Is it raining?"

Lou looks back at the lawn but in her mind sees the cruel light of the desert. Mars would be like that: all burnt umbers, siennas, purples, and a pale blue wash of sky. "They want me on Mars," she says to her mother. "They want somebody to paint it now. Before it gets civilized."

Without her makeup her mother already looks dead. A bot has brushed her hair until it glows and washed her face until it shines. She wonders if the bot was gentle.

That's a terrible color lipstick, her mother says. It is eleven o'clock in the morning and it is the first time her mother's really looked at her all day. It makes you look jaundiced, Mama says. Can't you dress yourself any better than that? Why do you always want to look ugly?

The store is crowded. People are all around them. Some of the people hear and turn their heads to stare. She feels very ugly, very yellow.

"Even when I offered them a lot of money, they turned me down. Colonists must be useful, they told me. Everyone must have a job. I explained that it would be important to me to see you buried. There's lots of land there. I pictured a little plot for you, just six feet by two, all your own. And a headstone with one of your favorite sayings. 'STAND UP STRAIGHT.' Or, 'YOU'RE GETTING FAT.' Something to remember you by."

Mama's head twitches like a bot with a program error. The slight palsy has made one eyelid perma-

nently lower than the other. "Is it raining yet?" she asks in a wavering, piccolo voice. "Remember to close the window."

"Say something meaningful for once, Mama. Talk about something other than your health or how your geraniums are doing."

Her mother turns those time-blinded eyes out to the lawn. A silly-baby smile tugs senselessly at her lips. "It's raining."

Lou sits. "Please talk to me."

That's nice, dear, her mother says as she stands back and looks doubtfully at the painting. Lou stands poised, toes balanced on the precipice, waiting for something, anything else. Her mother speaks. Are those the bluebonnets? That patch of blue there? And is that green color the grass?

Yes, Mama.

They're not very realistic, are they?

Don't you like it?

I wish you'd filled in the rest of the painting. And I don't understand why you put the highway in it. Seems like a funny scene to paint.

It is funny. That's what it's supposed to be. Don't you read the title, see the painting and laugh?

"Bluebonnets #17?" That's the title?

Yes.

It's hanging in the National Museum of Modern Art, Mama, she wants to shout. Some people think it's funny. The curator of the museum says he laughs every time he looks. Can't you even smile?

Your Aunt Penny was an artist, her mother says.

I know.

She painted bluebonnets, too. But those paintings had pretty oak trees and little wooden bridges and cows. The bluebonnets looked like bluebonnets. Couldn't you do something like that?

No, Mama. To me, bluebonnets always looked this way.

The door slides open and Mr. Parks is there.

"Not yet," Lou says.

He says, "I'm sorry," and comes forward anyway. He kneels down beside Mama. "Hello, Mrs. Jouette," he says.

"Hello," she replies, turning to look down at him. Her expression seems suddenly very coherent.

Lou stiffens. Her mother has not acknowledged Lou's arrival, but she knows Mr. Parks is there. Perhaps, Lou thinks, she will see a side to Mama that has been well hidden. Mama and Mr. Parks will play chess and discuss Immanuel Kant or suspension architecture.

"How are we today?" Mr. Parks asks.

Mama's smile broadens into a sweet benediction of a smile, a smile Lou has seen on the painted faces of Blessed Virgin Marys. "Is it raining?"

Mr. Parks takes a medication disc from his pocket. He is smiling, too. A Jesus-With-The-Children sort of smile.

"Is it time already?" Lou asks.

Mr. Parks darts a glance at her with his muddy gray eyes. "There's no sense prolonging it." He presses the disc to the frail white of Mama's wrists, right where the veins show through like velvet purple



cords. His thumb rubs gently and persistently over the bulge of the medication as he looks into Mama's eyes. Mr. Parks's messages are mixed. His thumb and eyes talk of love, but they also talk of murder.

Mama's smile broadens. She was never very good at the nuances of language.

"It won't be long now," Mr. Parks says to Lou. He is still smiling at Mama. Mr. Parks is very good at his job. "Take her other hand."

Lou hesitates.

Mr. Parks looks up at Lou. The smile has fled and in its place is a shocking, angry command. "Take her hand!" he snaps. Reaching forward, Lou does. Mama's hand is cool and dry.

"Tell her you love her."

Lou looks at him with disbelief.

"Tell her you love her," he says.

"She doesn't know me."

"It doesn't matter. Tell her you love her, anyway. There isn't much time."

Tears spring up in Lou's eyes. They surprise her. "Mama?" Her voice shakes. "Mama? It's Lou."

Mama's eyes are closing. She is still watching Mr. Parks.

"Mama?"

Please look at me, she thinks. Won't you even look at me? "I love you," Lou says. Even now she is embarrassed by saying it.

Right now, she thinks. Right now Mama will finally look at me. She'll see me for once, not just the way I'm dressed or the way my hair looks. And there will be one of those moments when everything becomes clear. Isn't that what death is all about? And she'll explain herself to me. Just a word or two is all that's needed, but something I can think about and finally understand.

Thin, translucent lids roll down over the marbles of Mama's eyes. Her mouth opens just a bit. Lou strains forward to catch the last whisper and feels a puff of warm breath at the side of her face.

Mr. Parks says, "She's gone." In a moment he says in a louder voice, "You can let go of her hand, now. She's gone."

Lou jerks. She loosens her grip and stands, straightening her skirt. Her knees feel watery as if her body wants her to kneel some more.

Her mother's death leaves a taste in her mouth like vinegar and a sound like low-level humming in her ears. If the death were to have a color, it would be an artificial, heavy-metal green.

"There's a little ceremony before cremation. You might like to attend."

"No, thank you," Lou wonders if her tears have damaged her makeup.

Mr. Parks follows her out the door. The hall is empty. "We've had our problems, Ms. Julette, but I want you to know I admire you."

She glances at him, surprised.

"I think your fighting it was wrong, but I think it was admirable, too. It reminded me of that poem, 'Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night.'"

She can think of no way to respond.

"We're trained, of course, to see death as a gentle,

fitting conclusion, but I can sympathize with the way you see it."

Her lips move for a moment before sound emerges. "How do I see it?"

Mr. Parks seems surprised. "If you haven't come to grips with it, of course, we have counselors. It's hard losing someone you love in just that way. That's why I had you hold her hand. It's not so important for the traveler as it is for the leave-taker. And, in our institution, the leave-taker is never forgotten." He holds his hand out. She takes it, wondering if he, too, is planning to die and if she should tell him she loves him.

"Your paintings ..." he says. For a moment they stand in the hall very much like lovers, hands clasped and growing somewhat sweaty. He looks at her with a lover's confusion, too. "I've always liked your paintings."

"Thank you, Mr. Parks." She slips her hand from his, her palm hot from his touch. "That's more than my mother would ever say."

She turns and makes her way out the door.

Outside in the sun she stops, confused. Two gardening bots are working among the flowers. With a sense of disorientation, she realizes she has been looking for her car. Her mother's death has been a trip in time of sorts.

Turning aside to the covered, motorized walkway, she steps on and lets it take her to the station.

Two stops before her apartment she gets off the tram and wanders into a supermarket. She realizes that if the bots working the aisles could show surprise, they would have. She feels conspicuous, as if her slip were showing.

Lou makes her way around a startled black woman with a cheap stained coverall and three children in tow. The woman stares at her with hot, dark, suspicious eyes.

I used to come here all the time, Lou wants to say to the woman. Mama and me. The grocery store was an outing for us. We could relate here, for the most part, talking about the breads and about the meats. While we were in the store at least we had a topic of conversation. Something that interested us both for a while. But even though Lou walks within a foot of the woman, they don't speak. The death of the supermarket, like the death of her mother, has been so protracted that there isn't much left to say.

Going to the fresh food section, Lou picks through the produce. The oranges have a slick, nubby skin; the potato toes are dusty and smell of earth.

I just think you should do bluebonnets the way they used to be, Mama says. I like to see them as if they were still real, the way your Aunt Penny used to paint them.

You used to take me every spring to look for bluebonnets. To me the ride was the most important thing. There were never any bluebonnets without cars to see them by.

They used to be so beautiful, and now they're gone. It's a shame to remember them that way.

Bluebonnets were only background, Mama.

Lou stands staring at the peach in her hand. With

its heavily rouged cheek and yellow skin it reminds her of the way morticians used to paint corpses.

Dropping the peach back into its refrigerated bin, she turns down the next aisle and stops short. Red and white Campbell paper cans are ranged over nearly half the shelves. She remembers the ache of childhood fevers and the taste of chicken noodle soup. She remembers Mama coming in the darkened room like a sweet ghost.

Trembling, she reaches out and picks up a can. The household bot will fix it for her, but it won't be the same. It won't be bluebonnets.

I want to go to Mars, she thinks with abrupt vehemence. The thought is surprising, but the decision, in many ways, is not. I need to go there only because I'll never have to remember Mars the way it was before. Or should have been.

The soup can in her hands, she walks to the checkout counter. The bot arm reaches out and clamps the can gently as the side of its metal claw scans the price.

"Five ninety-five," the bot says. "Will that be cash or card?"

She looks across the counter. The voice has come from the side of an elderly liquid crystal screen which shows the total and the words, "IT W S A A PLEASURE TO ERVE YOU." She starts to shake.

"Will that be cash or credit?" the bot asks again, very pleasantly.

It waits for an answer, its mechanical hand pushed forward to accept payment.

She's sobbing now, helplessly, her shoulders moving with it. Her mouth opens in an O of anguish.

"Is this a robbery?" the bot asks politely.

A childish "whuh-whuh" sound of misery comes from her throat. She wants to answer, but can't.

After a programmed wait, the bot asks, "Are you ill?"

When she doesn't answer this time, there is a quiet TING over her head. Having exhausted its possible responses, the bot has called a human. He arrives, looking disheveled and surprised. Apparently not much goes on in supermarkets anymore, Lou thinks.

She leans on the counter. A warm tear splashes out over her hand. She can hear the ugly sounds she's making, but can't stifle them.

Stop that crying, Mama says. Stop it. Everyone's looking at you.

"Ma'am?" the store manager asks. "Ma'am? Are you okay?"

Here, baby, here, Mama says. Put your head right here. And let me see your knee.

The crying has made her feel helpless, the way being sick or hurt always made her feel.

Oh, God, Mama, Lou thinks. It'll never be better. It wasn't even any better when I was living it. For you it was the bluebonnets; for me it was only the ride.

A warm hand reaches out and takes hold of her arm. The man is very close to her now. He slides his other arm around her shoulders and leads her to a chair. "What's the matter?" His voice is concerned in the practiced way Mr. Parks's voice was concerned.

She wants to lean her head on his shoulder, but

that wouldn't do, either. That part, the child-in-the-protective-land-of-the-adults part, has been gone for a long, long time. Even if she marries, no one will ever hold her that way again. No one could ever be that big; and she will never again be that small.

Her mouth stretches wide and very carefully over the words, as if the words themselves are made of splintered glass. "My mother ..."

"Yes?" the man asks.

She looks at him, but the tears make him a confusing jumble of light and dark, like an angel in an abstract stained-glass window. She thinks to explain the bluebonnets to him, but finds, after all, that was only one of the givens, too obvious to mourn. "My mother just died," she says. □

Incantation

By Jovanka Kink

*No beating drum nor mystic scents will conjure these;
Their souls are older, and they care not what it means
To beat the drum or chant the rites
Or hiss at cauldrons in the candlelight,
Or dance like dervishes, or call them all by name —
A human ritual cannot these spirits tame.*

*But if you go where dew drips from the leaves
And silence hangs like mists of ancient dreams,
And if you bring a bit of jungle home
And nurture it, and lay beside it stone
Dug reverently beneath a sun as hot
As that which warmed the ones who were, and now are not,
And if you hold the stone and feel the time
That passed from when these fossils lived their lives,
And if, on moonless nights, you know you hear the cry
From memory, and sense the scrape of claws upon your floor —
Then call the Thunder Lizards to your door.*

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Moving?

We expect our subscribers to move, but if you want to get your next issue of *Aboriginal*, please tell us 45 days before the next issue is due out. For instance, the next issue will be mailed about July 15, so if you are moving, please tell us by June 1 what your new address will be. The post office will not always forward second-class mail.

Burn So Bright

(Continued from page 35)

to happen today, something big and final, and they wanted to see it, but they hoped that, by staying indoors, whatever that big happening would be somehow it wouldn't touch them. That was just wishful thinking. Today's events would transform an entire world.

The Aliens moved forward, chirping amongst themselves, waving tentacles, and actually crawling over one another in their rush to get down the street. It looked like a stampede. For just a moment, I thought they'd move past us, oozing down the street. But they stopped. Only the cloud of dust they had kicked up, floated on by.

They squatted ten deep around the Swan. They chirped and squabbled like a flock of birds, beating at each other with their tentacles.

"My Swan," whispered Tom.

That was all they were interested in. They'd waited a year to see a crudely sculpted Swan whittled by a drunken old Indian. The sun was still directly overhead, and the Swan shimmered, water dripping down it, filling the turkey pan. Its neck had grown thin, having become little more than an icy filament. I'd watched this happen five times before. The long, graceful neck would melt away until the weight of the head would snap the thinning ice.

The Aliens quieted, then stopped moving altogether. Not a single tentacle thumped the ground. All I could hear was the gentle purr of the fans mounted in the bottom of their aluminum-foil suits.

Snap.

The Swan's neck cracked cleanly, separating right at its shoulders.

Plop.

The head and neck fell into the melt water that now half filled the turkey pan.

As if the Swan head hitting the water had been some sort of signal, all hell broke loose. The Aliens screamed, and beat at each other with their tentacles, ripping and shredding the aluminum-foil suits. Whispy tendrils of yellow smoke and green liquid streamed all around them. Tom could take no more and, turning, ran into the tavern. I almost followed, but didn't. I was the one that had seen it begin, and I felt that I should be the one to see it end.

In unison they slumped to the ground, throwing up one final sulfurous belch. Their tentacles beat feebly in the hot air.

Something rattled down by my feet. One of them crawled up onto the porch, dragging itself onto the wooden planks. It wrapped a tentacle around my boot and dragged itself toward me. I felt a shudder run through my leg, and saw the Alien convulse. Only a few of those in the street still moved, most now still, not even the fans in their shredded suits purring.

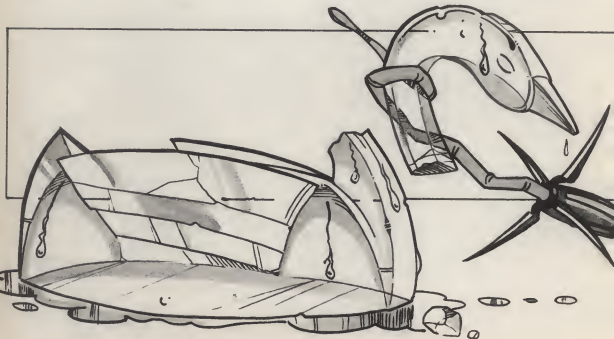
"I hope you can forgive us," it said with a voice that I hadn't heard in a year. It had pushed itself up and, shaking and quivering, it weaved back and forth.

"Forgive you?" I asked.

"You burn so bright," it said. "We weren't strong enough to resist, and thereby caused you to burn even brighter. Can you forgive us?"

"I still don't understand."

"You do," it said, then turning its body slightly, it pointed with a drooping tentacle to what was left of the Swan. "I can see it within you," it said. "You knew the



Swan would burn brightest, because you knew it would be the first to wither under the beating sun."

It could read my thoughts.

"What burns fastest, burns brightest," it said.

They had passed by all the other ice sculptures, going directly for the Swan, because they knew it would be the first to melt away. I felt dizzy, and the street seemed to spin. I knew why they had come, and I knew why they were asking my forgiveness. I should have known from the very first day. They had told me why they were here over a year ago, but I hadn't understood.

I touched my chest with the open palm of my hand. "We burn brightly like the Swan," I said. "Quickly and brightly."

The Alien shook its tentacles.

"You understand," it replied. "We've traveled the cosmos, and it's a cold, barren, and ugly place. Billions of years pass between the time when a creature raises itself up to question the nature of the stars and then finally tries to reach out for them. Not you. You burn so bright. You dreamt of the stars before you could even see them. You believe nothing is beyond your reach, and then you act to make it so." It convulsed, several of its tentacles dropping to the wooden porch. "We were dying, already dead, only the few of us left, when we sensed you and felt the fire burning. It was our wish to bask in your brightness before we died. But we didn't understand you sufficiently, not realizing before it was too late that our very presence was pushing you into one final, all-consuming burst of flame."

The tentacle that had been wrapped around my leg uncoiled itself, then slowly rose upward. Aluminum foil peeled from its tip, and the gray flesh underneath boiled.

"You burn far too brightly now. You're being consumed in your own flame."

Above me, and beyond the dome that enclosed Furnace Creek, the sky suddenly turned red and gold.

The naked tentacle tip touched my forehead. My entire head tingled.

"Fill the universe with your bright burning," it said.

I felt an invisible steel spike driven through my head, and both the Alien and I convulsed in ragged spasms.

"The flame is already spreading across this world," it whispered within my head. "You must do it now. Within you is the knowledge to save what is within the protection of this bubble."

The tentacle dropped from my forehead, and the Alien sagged to the porch.

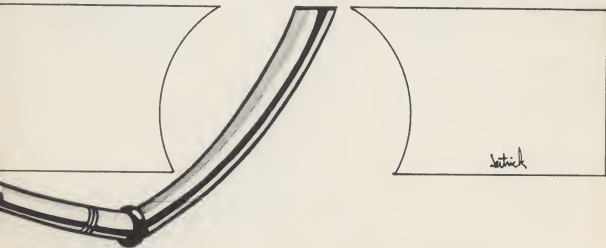
I walked into the street, stepping over their dead bodies, and moved to the turkey pan. Reaching in, I pulled out the Swan's head and neck. The turquoise eyes still shimmered bright blue. Holding the chunk of ice high above my head, I stared up unblinkingly into the sun. The Alien had shown me a new world, blue-green and unspoiled, halfway across the galaxy. I opened a hole through space and, standing under rainbow streamers, walked through, taking Furnace Hole and its fifty-eight other inhabitants with me.

Above me, in a sky tinted strangely green, I saw a distant and phantom Earth shimmer. It suddenly flashed to crimson, then vanished altogether as it was consumed in a blinding white brilliance.

When I looked down into my open hand, all that remained of the Swan's head were its twin turquoise eyes.

It had burned so bright.

□

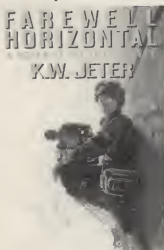


Bookshelf

(Continued from page 23)

plans future novels set between now and 2021; I'd certainly be interested in reading them.

Some details about history and technology which would have been helpful in understanding the novel are left unexplained until very near the end, which is a bit frustrating. The technology of transmatation, which resembles *Star Trek's* transporter beam, remains obscure, though I like the danger and the grotesque horror of the failures. Brummels occasionally falls into the trap of calling a familiar object by a new name for no good reason, e.g., a "writer" instead of a pen.



Brummels has created a beautiful and horrific vision of a world on the verge of holocaust, finishing the job the Third World Wars didn't. It is engaging and richly detailed, and I recommend it despite the plot weaknesses and other flaws. I'll be looking forward to the author's next book.

Rating: ☆☆☆½

Farewell Horizontal
By K. W. Jeter
St. Martin's, 1989
249 pp., \$16.95

K. W. Jeter is one of the hot young stars of SF, and his versatility makes him impossible to pin down to one sub-genre. His latest work, *Farewell Horizontal*, has a

bit of a cyberpunk flavor but is uniquely Jeter's. It is a very visual book, and the plot is exciting, though the ending is disappointing.

The people in Jeter's world live in an enormous Cylinder, floating above what may or may not be the Earth — the view is blocked by a cloud barrier, and the inhabitants are completely incurious about their history. Most people live inside, on the horizontal levels, but the outlaws and misfits, including protagonist Ny Axxtter, have gone vertical, living on the outside wall of Cylinder, where endless battles rage among competing military tribes. Axxtter is a graffex, who designs graphics for tribes. His big break, a chance to work for the number-two tribe, Havoc Mass, turns into a nightmare, as he barely escapes death and must spend the rest of the book trying to save himself by exposing a frightening conspiracy.

Cylinder is a fascinating world, extremely inventive and solidly real. Jeter succumbs to an expository lump only once, early in the book, when Axxtter gives a lecture; otherwise, he's very good at painlessly slipping the details in to give the reader a picture of the world before he knows it. Axxtter is a good main character, although his impulses remain as murky as his past. The depiction of his relationship with his girlfriend misfires, though; we see so little of her, and so little of Axxtter's feelings for her, that it's impossible to feel a sense of loss when she dumps him.

The plot is suspenseful and fast-moving, but the book's ending is very weak. The last section of the novel, after Axxtter reaches the other side of Cylinder, goes much too fast. The conclusion is not satisfying, either; I anticipated that Axxtter would head below the cloud barrier to see what's down there, since most of what he thought he knew has been proven wrong.

Jeter throws out a whole bunch of neat ideas in the last several chapters and then leaves them hanging. He also clumsily provokes the reader's curiosity by having one character ask, "Haven't you ever wondered why...?" And if you're going to do that, you should at least hint at the

answers! Far too much remains unexplained.

The author creates rich, detailed images; I felt that I was on Cylinder with Axxtter. Apart from the clumsiness at the end, the book is well written, though I didn't like Jeter's habit of sticking the occasional first-person thought into the third-person narrative without italics or anything to set it off.

The book is well worth reading, and it won't bore you, but be prepared not to have everything explained, and to be disappointed by the ending.

Rating: ☆☆☆½



A Wind in Cairo
By Judith Tarr
Bantam/Spectra, 1989
261 pp., \$3.95

Judith Tarr's new fantasy is very much a woman's book, though this is neither praise nor criticism. By this I mean that it combines several sub-genres which generally appeal to women: a romance (albeit a highly unusual one), a horse book, a young girl's coming of age, and a tale of a woman warrior. As a result, few men are likely to read *A Wind in Cairo*, which is unfortunate, since it is different, enjoyable, and well written. It

swept me along, even though I was pretty sure where it was going.

The story has the flavor of a tale of the Arabian Nights. It is set in 12th-century Egypt, the time of Saladin and the Crusades. Hasan al-Fahl (the Stallion) is the spoiled son of a wealthy, powerful man. At last he gets himself into trouble his father can't get him out of, by gravely offending the most powerful magus in Egypt. This magus places a curse on Hasan, turning him into a true stallion, and arranging for him to be sold to Zamaniyah, the daughter of Hasan's father's most bitter enemy, a young woman whose father has raised her as a man.

stick with me for a long time.

I grew to really like Zamaniyah and even Hasan; their relationships with other characters are depicted well. It is quite a challenge to have a horse as a protagonist, even one who used to be a man, and Tarr pulls it off brilliantly.

The only major improvement could have been a less-predictable plot, but the book was such a delight to read that I didn't really mind knowing where the plot was going. *A Wind in Cairo* is an unusual, wonderfully-told fantasy, and I highly recommend it.

Rating: ☆☆☆

Feather Stroke

By Sydney J. Van Scyoc
Avon, 1989
264 pp., \$3.50

Sydney Van Scyoc's new novel, *Feather Stroke*, is a beautifully written fantasy with a detailed, carefully designed world. Its major flaw is a standard, predictable story.

Dara is one of the simple folk, a people who believe in living plainly (reminiscent of the Amish), who have immigrated to a new continent to escape the oppression of the old shore. But the old ways have followed, and when a rider comes to their village demanding Dara's older sister as bride for a merchant lord, Dara's world is ripped asunder. She must eventually take refuge with the Iijhari, mountain people who bring forward the magic abilities she has tried desperately to suppress for her whole life, and at length aid in the battle to keep the new land free.

The main character is very well drawn, likable, and believable. Though the style of the book is not obtrusive, Van Scyoc's prose and imagery are gorgeous. As I said, the book's main problem is its predictability. The plot is a mixture of standard coming-of-age fantasy with a romance novel, right down to the savage man who wishes to take the woman by force but is tamed by love. Often I found myself knowing what was going to happen well in advance, and sometimes I perceived a plot point well

before the characters did, from legitimate clues.

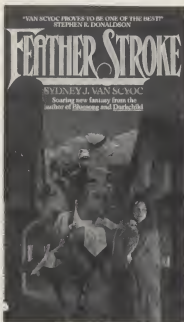
The book is worth reading, for the writing and characterization alone. It's a shame that all this lovely prose is wasted on such a generic plot.

Rating: ☆☆☆

A Disagreement with Death

By Craig Shaw Gardner
Ace, 1989
185 pp., \$3.50

A Disagreement with Death is Verse the Third in the Ballad of Wuntvor, the second of Craig Shaw Gardner's trilogies about the trials of Wuntvor and Ebenezum. As



Hasan must learn patience, honor, and discipline.

Don't let the ludicrously inaccurate cover fool you; Tarr's research is detailed and meticulous, and she made 12th-century Egypt come alive for me. She manages to get a lot of important background details clear without lectures or expository lumps, which is difficult to carry off. The story is almost believable, though I was never convinced that what Zamaniyah achieved was possible in her society (although Tarr mentions a couple of precedents). The novel is vivid and colorful, and many images from the book will



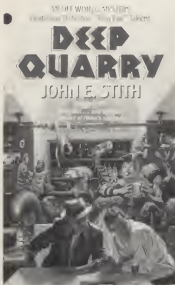
always with Gardner, it is very funny, though it doesn't have quite the sustained hilarity of the previous volume, *An Excess of Enchantments*, which was filled with fractured fairy tales. I wouldn't want to read all the books at one gulp, but I found this installment delightful.

It surprises me that Gardner has been able to maintain this series so long without becoming tiresome; even at the sixth volume, his invention doesn't flag. This time he takes us to Heaven, and an odd place it is, even if it isn't up there (down there?) in sheer insanity with the Netherhells. Wuntvor continues his

quest for a remedy for Ebenezur's allergy to magic, as well as having to protect himself against Death, who has become obsessed with him. All our old friends are back, from Damsel and Dragon to Plaugg the Moderately Glorious.

Everything that happens makes sense, in its own psychotic way. If you're tired of endless quest fantasies — and have a sense of humor that appreciates Bullwinkle and Monty Python — Gardner provides a wonderful antidote. Here's wishing the *Eternal Apprentice* many more heroes to tumble after.

Rating: ☆☆☆½



Deep Quarry
By John E. Stith
Ace, 1989
186 pp., \$3.50

The great John W. Campbell once said that it was impossible to write a science-fictional mystery because it was too easy to cheat by bringing in new technology and details unknown to the reader: "Well, Watson, my handy pocket Atomic Frammistan detects traces of strawberry lip gloss on the plastiglass, and since, as you know, lip gloss was outlawed in 2310 except for cloned space-ranch workers, the murderer must be..." Since then, such luminaries as Isaac Asimov have proved him

wrong, and the SF mystery has become an established sub-genre. However, the temptation to fall into Campbell's trap remains, as demonstrated by John E. Stith's *Deep Quarry*. As science fiction, it is enjoyable, if not terribly original; as a mystery, it is not so good.

The novel appears to be the first in a series about Ben "Bug Eye" Takent, a human detective on the planet Tankur who picked up his nickname because he's good at dealing with aliens. He is hired to investigate the disappearance of artifacts from an archaeological dig. The plot is thickened by murder and the discovery of an incredible alien relic which could lead to mass destruction.

I like the character of Takent, even though his hard-boiled style is a bit exaggerated. Stith has created an interesting universe, with a number of intelligent species, that could certainly give rise to more stories. I could have used more background on Tankur,

but, in general, the science fiction part of the book is fun and well-constructed, with some thoughtful points to make.

Which brings us to the mystery. There is at least one cheat, a method of murder that the reader couldn't know about. Even worse, I suspected something of the sort at the time, despite my ignorance, but the detective, who should have known of the possibility, suspected nothing. This is especially surprising since Takent is so un-trusting of everything and everybody else. In addition, the mystery really consists of two different mysteries, and they don't mesh; they might as well have been separate novels.

Deep Quarry is a fun romp, and the science-fiction aspects make it worth reading. I like the characters and the background, and I hope they will reappear, preferably with a better mystery to solve.

Rating: ☆☆☆





ABORIGINES

By Laurel Lucas

Adventures in *Glasnost*

We are pleased to bring you "The District Domino Championship" by prominent Soviet SF author **Kir Bulychhev**. Bulychhev (a pen name) is a historian of medieval Burma at the U.S.S.R.'s Oriental Institute and has been writing science fiction since the 1960s. He is the first SF author to win the U.S.S.R.'s prestigious State Prize, for one of his screenplays. As "Domino" demonstrates, he has a penchant for humorous social satire.



John H. Costello

about his favorite authors, he writes, "You do not know them. Mostly we shot them."

"The District Domino Championship" is translated by **John H. Costello**, who has done various translations from Russian for *Locus* magazine. Short stories by Costello, who used to be a field archeologist, have appeared in *Galileo*, the *Science Fiction Times*, and *Amazing*. He is presently working on some stories and a novel, *The Horses of Poseidon*, a retelling of the Trojan War from the standpoint of Aeneas.

"Domino" is illustrated by **Larry Blamire**. Larry is writing a new play while rewriting another. His latest is a darkly humorous love story set in a hobo jungle. That's the gathering place on the outskirts of town where the men and women who ride the rails commune.

Blamire is also taking part in



Larry Blamire

staged readings of other playwrights' works, most recently a new piece by Leslie Harrell. He says it's very useful to a playwright to hear actors saying the words before the final draft is



Kir Bulychhev

Macmillan has published three anthologies by Bulychhev in the U.S. and his fourth book, *The Settlement*, is being published here by Richardson, Steirman and Black.

Bulychhev's wife is **Kira Soshinskaya**, an SF artist who illustrates many of his books. They have a cat named Mouse. Bulychhev's hobby is phaleristics — collecting medals. When asked



Patricia Anthony

hammered out.

"Bluebonnets" is by **Patricia Anthony**, the author of a number of our favorite stories (see "Good Neighbor" in the Sept.-Oct. '88 issue and "Eating Memories" in our last issue). She says this is her "favorite short story so far," adding that it "just came out real quick" and needed very little "tinkering." Writing this anguished tale of a mother and daughter also helped her work out some problems, she says. She just laughed when I asked her if her mother has seen a copy yet.

Pat recently sold two stories to *Weird Tales* and one to *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and has been writing or rewriting a story a weekend. But she says *Aboriginal* author **Kristine Kathryn Rusch** is someone whose output is really "amazing. She must be ambidextrous or something," Anthony says.



Lucy Synek

"Bluebonnets" is illustrated by **Lucy Synek**. She has done several book covers recently, including *The Whispering Tower*, by German author Thomas Wohlbein, and Andre Norton's *Wizard World*, coming out in August from Tor.

Lucy says she was going to be artist guest of honor at Rockon in Little Rock, Arkansas, at the end of April. She's also been trying to get back to her training and do more fine arts. Illustrating is okay, she says, but you've always got to leave "that one-third empty space at the top."



R. P. Bird

"The Soft Heart of the Electron" is by **R.P. Bird**, who makes his debut in *Aboriginal* with this story of a hero with tragically human needs.

At age 33, Bird has gone back to school to complete a B.A. in history. He has finished a story called "Nuke City Blues" about a future where Richard Nixon is brought back to life to rule a city, and he's working on *Soft Error Bash*, an SF novel.

"Soft Heart" is illustrated by **David Brian** and one of his illustrations was chosen for this issue's cover. Brian has been busy doing an illustration for *Analog* and three covers for *Science Fiction Chronicle*. His advertisement for the National Space Society, called "Leonardo's Finale," is still getting encore requests. The ad



David Brian

depicts da Vinci at a French chateau in the last year of his life, and he's working on a model of — the space shuttle. The Space Coast Science Center in Florida has asked to use the original painting for an exhibit of da Vinci's inventions sponsored by IBM. And McDonnell Douglas wants to use a slide of the painting for an educational project.

We have another new *Aboriginal* author in **Brooke Stauffer**, who wrote the colorful "At Kokomo Joe's." In fact, as he puts it, "This is it, sports fans, the big FIRST PUB!!!"

Although this is his



Brooke Stauffer

breakthrough into published fiction, Stauffer has long been a prolific non-fiction writer. He pens high-tech R&D material for magazines and newspapers, and he calls it "excellent training for writing fiction."

He and wife **Sharon**, a piano teacher, went to England on vacation recently and visited such attractions as the London Dungeon, "a museum of torture, persecution and plague." He says that "England made a big impression on me, my next story will be set in a moat."

"At Kokomo Joe's" is illustrated by **Larry Blamire**.

Robert Metzger is back in two capacities. He's written a short story called "Burn So Bright." Granted, this is more serious than some of his previous works, but it is still uniquely Metzger. (If you are unacquainted with Metzger's

particular style of "gonzo" SF, you should catch "A Symbiotic Kind of Guy" in our last issue or "Unfit to Print" in the Nov.-Dec. 1988 issue.)

He says he got the idea for "Burn So Bright" trying to think of extreme contrasts. He thought of driving through the desert near Las Vegas, and an ice festival came to mind.

Metzger also begins a regular science column for *Aboriginal* in this issue. His first topic — quantum dots. Bob says he regularly scans some 25 scientific journals in the library and will jump into "whatever catches my fancy." He wants people to read his columns then "look up, look around the room and see things a little differently." He hopes to impart "some of the same sense of wonder I have" for a subject.



David Deitrick

David Deitrick illustrates "Burn So Bright." Deitrick has been busy teaching at the University of Alaska, producing commercial art and art for games and games magazines like *Traveler's Digest*.

And he says the moose are back. They are more conspicuous than ever in parts of Alaska, sticking their heads in the door when you go for firewood, nibbling at the garden, pestering the kids. They are disdainful of all noisy attempts to scare them off. Deitrick may complain, but he knows when he actually moves away from Alaska he will miss it "terribly."

"Incantations" is a poem by newcomer **Jovanka Kink**, a 20-



Jovanka Kink

year-old college student working on degrees in biology and geology. Kink has had poems published for the last three years in small-press magazines such as *The Haven*, *Alpha Adventures*, *Nexus*, and *Flights*. A short story, "The Transmigration of Chibbing," came out in 1988 in *Nexus*.

Kink is a champion of misunderstood and endangered animals like bats ("they do not get into people's hair") and snakes. As you might guess from her poem, she's fond of fossils and dinosaurs as well and she hopes to study herpetology one day.

Bruce Boston brings us "Of Archetypes and Arcologies." Boston's previous *Aboriginal* works include "A Hero of the Spican Conflict" (Nov.-Dec. 1987), which was nominated for a Rhysling Award.

Boston won the 1988 Rhysling Award in the short poem category for another work, the title poem in his book *The Nightmare Collector*.



Bruce Boston

It will be reprinted in *Nebula Awards 24* in 1990.

Boston has a book of short stories called *Hyper Tales and Meta Fictions* due out next year from Chris Drumm publishers, and two other books of poems, *Short Circuits*, coming out in the fall from Ocean View, and *Chronicles of the Mutant Rain Forest*, with Robert Frazier, coming out in 1990 from Mark Ziesing publishers.

Awards

Dean R. Koontz was recently given the Collectors Award for 1988 for the "Most Collectable Author of the Year," and Alex Berman, Phantasia Press, was given the award for the "Most Collectable Book of the Year" by the book firm of Barry R. Levin Science Fiction & Fantasy Literature, A.B.A.A. Berman was honored for the publication of the deluxe lettered state of *The Uplift War* by David Brin.

The Hugo nominees for 1989 have been announced by Noreascon Three, the 47th World Science Fiction Convention. The winners will be chosen by the members of Noreascon Three and announced on Saturday, Sept. 2, at the Hugo awards ceremony in the Hynes Convention Center in Boston. *Aboriginal* received a nomination for the second year in a row and we're delighted just to be on the ballot.

The full list of Hugo nominees is:

BEST NOVEL

Cyteen by C. J. Cherryr
Falling Free by Lois McMaster Bujold
Islands in the Net by Bruce Sterling
Mona Lisa Overdrive by William Gibson
Red Prophet by Orson Scott Card

BEST NOVELLA

"The Calvin Coolidge Home for Dead Comedians" by Bradley Denton
 "Journals of the Plague Years" by Norman Spinrad
 "The Last of the Winnebagoes" by Connie Willis
 "The Scalehunter's Beautiful Daughter" by Lucius Shepard
 "Surfacing" by Walter Jon Williams

BEST NOVELETTE

"Do Ya, Do Ya, Wanna Dance" by Howard Waldrop
 "The Function of Dream Sleep" by Harlan Ellison
 "Ginny Sweethearts' Flying Circus" by Neal Barrett, Jr.

"Peaches for Mad Molly" by Steven Gould

"Schrodinger's Kitten" by George Alec Effinger

BEST SHORT STORY

"The Fort Moxie Branch" by Jack McDevitt

"The Giving Plague" by David Brin

"Kirinyaga" by Mike Resnick

"Our Neural Chernobyl" by Bruce Sterling

"Ripples in the Dirac Sea" by Geoffrey A. Landis

"Stable Strategies for Middle Management" by Eileen Gunn

BEST DRAMATIC PRESENTATION

Alien Nation

Beetlejuice

Big

Who Framed Roger Rabbit

Willow

BEST PROFESSIONAL EDITOR

Gardner Dozois

Edward L. Ferman

David G. Hartwell

Charles C. Ryan

Stanley Schmidt

BEST NON-FICTION BOOK

A Biographical Dictionary of Science Fiction and Fantasy Artists

by Robert Weinberg

First Maitz

Don Maitz

The Motion of Light in Water

By Samuel R. Delany

The New Encyclopedia of Science Fiction

edited by James Gunn

Science Fiction Fantasy and Horror:

1987 by Charles N. Brown and William G. Conteno

BEST ARTIST

Thomas Canty

David Cherry

Bob Eggleton

Don Maitz

Michael Whelan

BEST SEMIPROZINE

Interzone

Locus

The New York Review of Science Fiction

Science Fiction Chronicle

Thrust

THE JOHN W. CAMPBELL AWARD

FOR BEST NEW WRITER

P. J. Beese & Todd Cameron Hamilton

Christopher Hinz

Melanie Rawn

Michaela Roessner

Kristine Kathryn Rusch

William Sanders

Delia Sherman

BEST FANZINE

File 770

Fosfax

Lan's Lantern

Niekas

OtherRealms

BEST FAN WRITER

Avedon Carol

Mike Glyer

Arthur D. Hlavaty

Dave Langford

Guy H. Lillian III

Chug Von Rospach

BEST FAN ARTIST

Brad W. Foster

Teddy Harvia

Merle Insinga

Stu Shiffman

Tara Wayne

Diana Gallagher Wu

Editor

(Continued from page 6)

our writers, artists and staff. The final product is not something any one individual can claim credit for. And I say us because there is no category for best magazine. The Best Editor category is the closest it gets.

Other "Aborigines" nominated for a Hugo include artist Bob Eggleton, who was nominated for Best Professional Artist once again, and Kristine Kathryn Rusch, who was nominated for the John W. Campbell Award for the Best New Writer. I can say with some certainty that we are, except maybe for Bob who has published in some of the larger circulation magazines, clear underdogs, having the smallest circulation of the professional magazines, except for *Amazing*, and a much smaller market presence than David Hartwell, the book editor who was nominated. And, lest we forget, Walter Jon Williams's novella "Surfacing" was nominated for Best Novella. Walter's story "The Bob Dylan Solution" will be in our next issue.

Boomerang Awards

Well, the results are in and the final votes are tabulated for the first Boomerang awards. They were voted by our readers in three categories for stories first published in 1988.

Even though there were three categories — Best Story, Best Art and Best Poem — we had four winners, because there was a tie for Best Poem.

We will be sending the awards to the winners, since we aren't big enough to be able to fly them here for a presentation.

Each winner will receive a real boomerang with the prize category engraved into the wood.

The winners were:

Best Story: "Cat Scratch," by Emily Devenport, in the Sept./Oct. 1988 issue.

Best Art: Courtney Skinner for his illustration for "The Darkness Beyond," in the May/June 1988 issue.

Best Poem: A tie, with honors going to Bruce Boston for "Against the Ebon Rush of Night" in the Sept./Oct 1988 issue and Bonita Kale for "From A New World," in the March/April 1988 issue.

The voting was almost evenly divided among the sexes, with 52 percent of the voters male and 48 percent female.

The next most popular stories were "Good Neighbor," by Patricia Anthony, which was only one vote behind "Cat Scratch," and three other stories that tied: "Anomaly," also by Patricia Anthony, "To Be an Auk" by Elaine Radford, and "Arachne," by Elissa Malcohn, which all tied only one vote behind "Good Neighbor."

The second most popular art was for "Arachne," illustrated by Pat Morrissey.

The rest were evenly divided.

Other popular poems included "Who Made the Stew on Betelgeuse II?" by Esther Friesner, and "All Creatures Great and Small," by Elissa Malcohn.

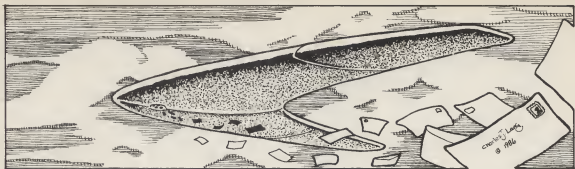
What? No SASE?

For some reason that continues to puzzle us, we are receiving a number of submissions of material that are not accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE).

We hold all such submissions for about four months and then they are disposed of in a convenient manner. We're sorry about that, but we don't have much choice.

We are willing to look at anyone's short story, poem, cartoon, or art samples. But we aren't going to go into competition with the U.S. Postal Service. All submissions belong to those who submit them. If you want your submission back, or if you want to know what we thought of it, you must include an SASE for our reply.

That's all until next issue. Take care. □



Boomerangs

Comments From Our Readers

Dear *Aboriginal*,

I'm just writing to let you know that I absolutely love your magazine. I have been an avid sci-fi reader most of my short life and think yours is the best I've ever read. I think the name *Aboriginal SF* is unique and fitting. I have to admit, at first it took awhile to get used to but I hope you'll never change it.

Thank you! Thank you!

Melany Ruiz

Vacaville, CA

P.S. Keep the brilliant artwork coming!!

Dear Charlie:

It's too much to hope that the critics will ever stop parroting each other, but let me try to set the record straight as regards the stale canards about John Campbell's later years that Darrell Schweitzer details in your March-April issue: "(A) severe decline in the importance and quality of *Analog* in the last 15 years or so.... The good old writers left him, including the very ones he had trained and made famous. The good new writers did not take their place...." because he "tried all sorts of doctrinaire tricks ... about ... psionics, political stances, and so on." How often have we heard this before?

Glancing over the contents of the magazine simply from 1961 through 1971, the last ten years of Campbell's life, one sees names such as Asimov, Blish, Bova (once with Harlan Ellison), Brunner, Clement, de Camp, Dickson, Herbert (*Dune*), Leinster, MacLean, McCaffrey, McLaughlin, Pohl and Kornbluth, Pournelle, Piper, Schmidt (the present editor), Schmitz, Simak, Spinrad, and Tiptree — none of them exactly negligible.

It's true that some equally distinguished names are missing, but there aren't many. Chance will account for much of this, style and temperament for the rest; after all, to the best

of my knowledge, no science fiction magazine whatsoever has gotten submissions from John Cheever or Eudora Welty.

Being among Campbell's fairly regular contributors myself, I can speak from experience. Stories of mine published in *Analog* during this same decade include "The Epilogue," *The Ancient Gods* (aka *World Without Stars*), "Starfog," the "Flying Mountains" series, and most of the van Rijn-Falkayn tales. They must have something going for them, since they all have been reprinted more than once. None toes any particular line about psionics, politics, or anything else. Campbell gave me the basic idea behind several, as well as behind numerous more — the same way he gave ideas to other writers, not as dictates but as suggestions. The last time we ever saw each other, shortly before his death, he casually tossed off a concept which led me to write *The People of the Wind* and related stories.

Yes, he did swallow dianetics, psionics, the Dean machine, and a lot of other concepts. I thought they were loopy and told him so, *viva voce* or in correspondence. He never made him angry, and he kept right on buying stories from me. Occasionally he'd reject one, and occasionally his reason for that was too profound a disagreement with its premises or conclusions. However, this was a matter of editorial judgment. In a similar position, I, too, would decline to publish work I felt was utterly wrongheaded, though my criteria would be different from his. The point is, to repeat, he never decreed what anybody must write.

Yes, several hacks did feed him back his own ideas in a mechanical fashion, making no effort to build on them. The results were uniformly dismal. I don't believe he was fooled. He had a magazine to fill, twelve times every year, and often this was the best he could get. The competition didn't

average any better.

Yes, John Campbell made his human share of mistakes, but to this day he towers so high above his detractors that I wonder why I bother to defend his name against them.

Regards,
Poul Anderson
Orinda, CA

Dear Editor,

I am appalled at the four-star rating (in your issue #14) given to the 28-page piece (may I say junk?) on page 17 about Robert A. Heinlein, *The Man Who Sold America* (Heinlein in *Dementia*).

Having read almost everything Robert wrote (and some of it several times), I still find him a champion of individualism (which I swear I do understand, despite either Payne's or your own reviewer's slam at Robert's readers) as well as the "frontier ethic" (which I suppose simply does not appeal to our current urban culture which may include the majority of science fiction readers).

I have no idea from what data Payne deduces "the common perception of Heinlein"; but I must find myself in agreement with *NASA* and *The Smithsonian* in awarding Heinlein the recent medal for being, in effect, the father of our space program. I would suggest that the "common" perception is chiefly common to the three writers of the pamphlet — certainly not to the multitude of remaining devotees.

I am not looking for the "light, fluffy, escapist stories" Schweitzer speaks of disparagingly in his opening paragraph, but I do confess to boredom with the emphasis these days on dull pseudoscientific technology which has taken the place of interest in plots and protagonists.

Sadly,
Betsy Curtis

(for a number of years a member of SFWA)
Saegertown, PA

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I just resumed my subscription to *Aboriginal SF*, buying back issues starting with January 1988 as well. I haven't gotten to the fiction yet in those seven issues, but I certainly will. If nothing else, many of the illustrations are so fascinating I must find out what the heck they're about.

It was actually your illos that got me back on board. I had let my subscription lapse because it seemed I almost never got around to reading the stories. But wandering around the art show at Boskone I kept seeing interesting items, original artwork marked as having been painted for *Aboriginal SF*. And while I could have had the items for a mere \$400, \$500, \$600 apiece, something told me, "Naah, subscribe to *Aboriginal SF* instead!" This is the only SF magazine worth getting even if you don't have time to read it.

But what I really wanted to write to you about is your nonfiction. I'm very impressed by Darrell Schweitzer's contributions, especially his mini-essays on the nature of SF and fantasy. You should pay him more: maybe then he wouldn't try to sell me something at a convention!

I did want to pick up on one comment he made in his review of the horror collection, *Prime Evil*, in issue No. 12. Noting that all the contributors were men, he wondered "why so few women write horror when so many read it." Sado-masochism is deeply ingrained in horror fiction. Now, in the nature of things it seems typical for the male animal to tend toward sadism, and the female toward masochism. Thus: the male sadist writes the horror; the female masochist reads it. (I suspect there are other reasons for writing and reading horror. — Ed.)

Sincerely,
Taras Wolansky
Kerhonkson, NY

Dear Mr. Ryan,

I shall begin by saying some things that you will be glad to hear: I am hooked on *Aboriginal* after having read only one issue (#12) and the 1988 Anthology. The departments of the alien publisher and the editor were so well done in #12 that I have determined to read them first every issue.

By the way, the only thing I find in *Barlowe's Guide To Extraterrestrials* that remotely resembles the publisher is a Gowachin (taken from Frank Herbert's *The Dosadi Experiment*). Their home world is called Tandalo, but they live on many planets. Obviously living on our planet has not been good for the physical condition of this Gowachin. Just imagine what his colleagues will think of his mental state if

Memphis rubs off on him! Or does the picture presented us show the true form of the publisher? Perhaps a contest is in order in which your readers send in a description or drawing of what the fellow really looks like. You can pick one or run the best of the lot and let the readers decide. At least have a write-in contest to determine a name for the little bugger. (*He keeps changing shapes, as you may have noticed in issue #15. And we did have a contest and decided no name was best.* — Ed.) Such contests would serve as additional attachment for those of us who are beginning to regard the magazine as "ours."

If you have made it through this much of my letter you are no doubt able to tolerate a little constructive criticism.

Ellison's "Wave" took five pages to convey what it could have said in three. Also, the book reviews took up too many pages. Each review is an appropriate length but let's not have so many books reviewed per issue. *Aboriginal* is big now; schedule space to include an additional story or more poetry. Or is the 5 story/2 poem format going to be kept? (No. — Ed.)

Quickly I predicted the endings of "True Allegiance" and "Goodness." Still they were interesting and well-written stories. I found "Arachne" difficult to get through.

In the anthology I especially enjoyed the action with a twist supplied by "Search and Destroy" and the twisted action of "Regeneration."

Viewing the magazine as leisure reading, I tend to favor the action-oriented stories over the mind-boggling or more science-oriented ones. Also, I would like to see some fantasy incorporated into the magazine. I feel that our era will become known as the Age of Fantasy in literature. Just look at the multitude of fantasy selections in your local bookstore. Furthermore, bookstores usually combine the SF and Fantasy sections. So why shouldn't the unique, innovative *Aboriginal* do the same?

More comedy, too! "It Came from the Slushpile" was good. Slip in a humorous piece once in awhile; it will keep the mag from becoming monotonous.

Cordially,
Rocky Miller
Ellijay, GA

Dear Mr. Ryan,

Wow! Jeff, my husband, and I loved the wonderful stories in issue #13 Jan/Feb 1989 (first we've seen!). You have an excellent pool of writers to pull stories from — and I'd like to be one of them, but first... Yes, I cast my vote in favor of the Did You Know column. It was fascinating. "The Tinger" has been my all-time favorite horror movie since I was five and first saw it with my

kid brother and Dad, during the 6 a.m. Saturday Thriller Theatre. The tidbits of info this column offered were great. I also enjoyed the book reviews — thanks for the tips on how I can best spend that Christmas gift certificate. I'm opting for *Haunting Women*. Count us in on a subscription for this year. Oh, and please don't change the name — it's priceless and right on the numbers!

Sincerely,
Melanie Raski
Chapel Hill, NC

Dear Mr. Ryan & Mr. Eggleton

I was very elated that my Sept.-Oct. 1988 issue arrived before the 1988 WorldCon in New Orleans (Nolacon) because it allowed me to take it and have it autographed by you (Mr. Ryan). I chanced upon Mr. Eggleton outside of the movie room and was delighted to speak to him. He looked surprised that I even knew who he was. Being an artist myself, how could I not know? Unfortunately, I was unable to find him again to have him autograph my copy of the Sept.-Oct. issue. Is there a way I can get this done now? It would mean so VERY much to me because you printed a letter of mine in that very same issue.

Deepest regards
Kimberly Ann Worley
Metairie, LA

Sorry,

I don't enjoy the art — too crude and usually violent.

I don't enjoy the stories — no depth of character.

Too much reliance on sensationalism — never found one yet that gave me new insights on human nature or new dreams of alien-ness nature.

So I won't be renewing.
Susan Wolf
Hawaii

(Obviously, I don't agree, but it just goes to show that it's impossible to please everyone. — Ed.)

Dear Editors:

As a freelance writer, it's rare that I see a magazine that impresses me. *Aboriginal* impresses me! The look, layout and content are all excellent. You should be proud of your publication. I have set a goal for myself — to be printed in *Aboriginal SF*.

I do have a question that I would like answered. The first copy of *Aboriginal* I purchased was the Jan./Feb. 1988 issue. I'm not sure why, but that issue was on sale this November at a magazine stand in the Oakdale Mall, Johnson City, New York. I read that copy and loved it, and I think the best story in it is "Solo for Concert Grand" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch. My question regards the artwork, done by Bob Eggleton, for that story.

The cover art for the story is excellent, but the artwork shown on page

37 (the two hands shown imposed on the minuet page) creates a problem. The hand of the alien, the Miaslan, shows the thumb and four fingers. In the story though, on page 38 in the left-hand column's fourth paragraph down, the fifth sentence, the author states:

"She stood there, watching the long hands with no thumbs press together, as the applause became deafening."

I thought you might want to know, if it had not yet been brought to your attention, that the artwork appears in error. The quality of both artwork and story are excellent.

I have since bought your Nov./Dec. 1988 and Jan./Feb. 1989 issues. I look forward to your next issue, and I plan to check Waldenbooks at the Oakdale Mall for your anthology. As a P.S., please be aware that slick and glossy magazines are hard to dispose of in landfills because they liberate toxic materials as they break down. Thanks for listening to me. Continued good luck with *Aboriginal*. (You shouldn't throw away your copies. Save them, or donate them to a local library. — Ed.)

Sincerely,
John W. Koloski
Montrose, PA

Dear Mr. Ryan, et al.,

First of all, I would like to thank you for producing such a wonderful magazine. Since discovering it at my local Waldenbooks, I have enjoyed several issues, and will soon be getting a subscription. You have excellent stories and wonderful artwork!

There is one reason, however, why I especially like your magazine. It is the only one I have found that is published full-size on slick paper. Before finding your magazine, I had only heard of such magazines in reminiscences of the fifties, during the "Golden Age" of science fiction. I applaud you for bringing back this format for those of us that have never experienced it in association with a science fiction magazine. It gives your magazine an air of class and excellence a cut above the rest! I just wanted to let you know how much I have enjoyed your magazine. Also, I think you should keep the name! (Actually, even in the *Golden Age*, there was never a full-color, full-slick science fiction magazine. *Aboriginal* is the first. — Ed.)

Sincerely,
Christine Pulliam
(Alien High School Student!)
Pflugerville, TX

Hello again,

I really loved the November-December issue, not just because it had my letter in it. Robert Metzger's "Unfit to Print" is one of the most beautifully insane things I've ever read — I loved every word of it. "In the Shadow of Bones" (March-April 1989) is just as beautiful in an entirely different way,

and tremendously moving.

Scott Green's poem, "Mars Still Beckons," is another favorite. I'll pay it my supreme compliment and say that I wish I'd written it — I'm surprised I didn't, because the poem perfectly expresses my own feelings about space.

The cover art for "Three if by Norton" is terrific, and the story is cute — but I have to say that the story gallops along at breakneck speed. It's almost as if somebody had gone through and wacked out everything that even smelled like a transition.

There was something else in the Jan.-Feb. issue that worried me — the Editor's Notes, in which you indicated you would be getting more stories from "big-name writers." I don't have anything against Larry Niven or David Brin, and I understand your need to attract more readers to *Aboriginal*.

But — look at it from my perspective. You've only got so much space and so much money, right? So what if you're able to run a story by Robert Metzger or one by Larry Niven, but you can't handle both of them? Are you going to take Niven's story — which he could easily place in any one of several other magazines — and deprive Metzger's fans?

Or consider the worst thing that could possibly happen. What if you were torn between printing a story by

Harlan Ellison that would surely bring you hundreds of new subscribers — or accepting something from that brilliant young (well, comparatively) author, Nikki Patrick?

In other words, the big shots aren't hungry, but I am. They've had their breaks, but I'm still chasing mine. Please don't desert me, and all the other writers like me. (We haven't and we won't. We accept stories we want to publish no matter who writes them. We are adding, not subtracting. — Ed.)

Well, thanks for your attention. I'll go back to reading the new issue of *Aboriginal* now. I do wish you could go monthly. If I ration myself, I can make an issue last about three days, which leaves approximately 57 days without *Aboriginal* until the next issue arrives. The withdrawal pains are ferocious!

Nikki Patrick
Pittsburgh, PA

Dear Mr. Ryan,

First of all, allow me to say — as a new subscriber — that I am most pleased with my initial issues of *Aboriginal Science Fiction*. It proved to be everything I had hoped, and more. *Aboriginal*'s production values are quite remarkable. All of you, including the staff, are to be congratulated. The fiction was of the highest quality and the poetry was equally excellent.

Missing issues 4 & 5?

OK, so we ain't perfect. Somehow, in stacking issues of the magazines from the printers, we buried one box each of issues 4 and 5. We now have 100 of each of them left, but that's it.

So here's what we decided to do: For a very limited time (until we run out of the 100 copies) we will sell a complete set of *Aboriginal Science Fiction*'s first two years, issues 1-12, for \$50, plus \$5 shipping by UPS. We will only honor this offer as long as copies last, so hurry if you want the missing issues. If you only want issues 4 and 5, then we are forced to charge \$17 for the pair, plus \$3 for UPS shipping. We will only ship these UPS because we don't want any of the rare copies lost in the mail. Please note that



UPS will not deliver to a P.O. Box, so you need to give us a street address. To repeat: To just order copies of issues 4 & 5, send \$20. To order the complete set of 12 issues, send \$55. We will not sell 4 & 5 separately, only as a pair. By the way, hang on to your copies of issue 13 (Jan.-Feb. 1989) because issue 13 is completely sold out. To order 4 & 5 or the complete set, send your payment to:

Aboriginal SF
Missing Issues
P.O. Box 2449
Woburn, MA 01888-0849

In any event, I want to commend all of you once more, and to wish your magazine a long and lustrous future. Your endeavors are certainly worthwhile and, thus, all the more appreciated.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Charles D. Eckert
Columbus, IN

Dear Mr. Ryan and Crazy Alien,

Hello again. I'm making quite a bit of progress on my quest to reduce the "slush-pile" of reading that has accumulated over the last few months. I'm up to the Sept-Oct issue of *Aboriginal* now. In this issue there appeared a letter from a Mr. Dwight G. Clark and it is this letter that prompts this correspondence.

I agree with Mr. Clark's desire for "old-fashioned 'good guy' vs. 'bad guy' with a thrill-a-second story line" fiction. I cut my teeth on the works of Heinlein and Clarke — in fact the very first SF novel (that I can recall reading) was Heinlein's *Starship Troopers*. Here was shoot-em-up science fiction at its best; soldiers in high-tech power suits were dropped from a massive transport onto the planet's surface to do battle with the "bugs." The movie *Aliens* reminded me very much of this novel. Clarke's novels generally didn't employ this sort of action, but he wrote science fiction. Not fantasy. Not psycho-drama. Not what-if-it-had-happened-this-way stories.

Now I'm not berating these types of stories. I've matured some since those days and so have my tastes. But now that I'm actively writing SF myself (or trying to, anyway) I find my mind wanting to return to the subjects and styles that held my attention so well as a kid. Unfortunately every attempt to market this type of story has met with a rejection slip with a checkmark (if indeed ANY indication of why it is being rejected is given) on the line that says "Antiquated or over-used subject matter."

It is refreshing to find a kindred soul. Perhaps there is yet hope that our genre will once again swing back toward science fiction. Perhaps this is why I have come to appreciate *Aboriginal* so much. *Asimov's* magazine went down the Psycho-drama/Fantasy tubes long ago, *Analog* seems to be following. But the number of a stories like "Cat Scratch" or "Hana and His Synapses" that have appeared in *Aboriginal* renews my faith that a resurgence of "old-fashioned" SF is possible. (For your information, *Locus* recently reported *Aboriginal* SF had a higher percentage of stories actually set in space than any other magazine, only being exceeded by *Destinies*, a

book anthology put out by Baen Books. —Ed.)

Keep up the good work.
Faithfully Yours,
Douglas Bittering
Free-lance writer and avid SF fan
O'Fallon, IL

Dear Aboriginals,

I'd like to comment on some misconceptions concerning the physical reality of disabled people that were presented in Resa Nelson's story, "The Next Step," in the Jan.-Feb. '89 issue. The idea that people with spinal cord injuries have no sensation in the area of their paralysis, and therefore no sexuality, is a myth that is widely held. In fact, one of the first things I was told by my doctors after my injury was, "You're paralyzed, that means you can't move or feel." Putting the words "I'm as good as dead from the neck down" in the mouth of the quadriplegic protagonist of the story perpetuates these myths. When she refers to her body as a corpse no one would ever want to have sex with, and herself as no longer a real woman, she reveals the self-hatred and despair that result from internalizing such damaging assumptions.

The reality of spinal cord injury is that although the sensations of surface touch are often impaired, one becomes correspondingly sensitized to a realm of inner perception, which I can describe as a feeling of tingling, vibrating energy and flowing, prismatic light. It is certainly not dead in there! These deep inner sensations can be used to reroute, relearn and reintegrate one's sexuality, no matter how much or how little movement remains. Human sexuality goes far beyond mechanics, and does not depend on a technological "fix" such as the one described in this story to be expressed and fulfilled.

As SF readers and writers exploring the cutting edge of experience, we should be aware that people who become disabled and find themselves landed in radically changed bodies are challenged to live and function in a truly alternate reality.

Let's challenge and overcome oppressive and limiting stereotypes of disabled peoples, and all peoples, capabilities and functioning through dialogue and the exchange of information.

RB Baron
Albion, CA

Dear Mr. Ryan,

To write you concerning my long-lost subscription on November 28th, and then to receive the Jan/Feb issue a scant three weeks later — this is a response both amazing and fantastic, but in my experience not necessarily *aboriginal* — unless, in this country, one goes back to, say, Ben Franklin's time! Perhaps that's one aspect you've been concentrating on, and under-

scores the many comments from others in support of retaining the "Aboriginal" title. To these, please add mine. An effort to avoid offending is always worthwhile. Remember, however, that the Land of Oz is far away, and that some of their slang references might be deemed quite offensive here as well. And don't cross your legs in Saudi Arabia either. Do belch after eating.

Several comments: Several other publications I receive use a paper insert sheet in the plastic mailing wrap, upon which the mailing label is quite visible and doesn't mar the magazine cover. Is it possible such a sheet could also serve to show the UPC symbol; to have the newstand copies sealed in plastic might not hurt either.

\$2 by subscription and \$3 on the newsstand is certainly not too much for the quality of stories and presentation — don't be put off by cheapskates who want a five-star production for a one-star price. While I'm being argumentative, Mr. Richmond (letter, Issue #13) has overlooked Dr. Asimov's longstanding underestimation of his own talents. "All due respect" is, in Dr. Asimov's case, very difficult to determine, but it's somewhere between "all there is" and "all there ever could be" when one considers a body of work that spans nearly the entire existence of modern science fiction. I grew up on Asimov, so I'm hardly objective, but that's the point — I love the man's work and thus the man. So does the man, and I find that refreshingly realistic. Not to mention funny.

Let's see, Issue #13, page 14: Sorry I haven't lived up to expectations, but I haven't moved.

Your self-renewal idea is excellent. Look for emulation. I've enclosed my check, part of which is for self-renewal and part for the back-issue set. My November 28th letter advised of having been overlooked as a "charter subscriber" with the result that I did not receive issues 3 thru 12; I suppose the best that can now be done is to buy the back issues minus #4 and #5 which are apparently gone. Perhaps someone has these available for sale? If so, I'm interested. The rest of the money is for a gift subscription for the High School library, which is — by the way — an idea which you should push with other readers. Expanding the exposure of our young to media which have so positively influenced our lives is at once a pleasure and a duty. It also serves to provide support for the magazine during these critical growth years, and those that wish to help enhance the survival of *AbSF* (Like it? Use it!) might well consider contacting the librarians in their communities and schools, as well as local hospitals and other institutions, concerning subscription donations. These might even be tax-deductible! (Sounds like a good

idea, especially with most schools, libraries and hospitals facing budget cuts. How about it, folks? — Ed.)

Happily yours,
Jerome Keller
Denville, NJ

P.S. No answer from Harlan yet. I only expect a couple of words (not "Happy Birthday") but ain't that Harlan? I guess maybe you should be happy with his "I recommend it." That's three, and they're printable.

Dear Mr. Ryan:

We would like to thank *Aboriginal* for showing evidence that a real human being took care of our subscription. We wrote that we were confused about our standing and someone made sure we didn't miss a back issue by picking up where our old subscription had lapsed. We liked that.

The symbol that ends a story in your magazine shouldn't be a tiny cube. It should be a tiny boomerang. We really think this would be perfect. (Yeah, but we can't typeset a boomerang. — Ed.)

Say "Hi" to the frog for us.
Sincerely,
Doug and Mary Piero Carey
Canton, OH

Dear Charlie:

Orange. I have been reading and

enjoying book reviews by Darrell Schweitzer for some time. He is concise, original, and most importantly, nearly always in agreement with my own opinion. Our tastes are very similar (I dislike fantasy about as much as he does (I think you were right on the money in your answer to Ms. Hutchinson's letter in issue No. 14, by the way)) and have purchased books based on his reviews without ever being disappointed (near as I can recall). Given my obvious admiration for Mr. Schweitzer, you may be able to appreciate my astonishment at the hatchet job he did on Sheri S. Tepper's novel, *The Gate To Women's Country* (also in No. 14).

This was also the first book of Ms. Tepper's I had read, as it was for Mr. Schweitzer. Contrary to his opinion, I found it to be a truly fascinating and well-written story, possibly the best novel (of 50 or so) that I read last year. Ms. Tepper took a subject that admittedly has been done before, and handled it better than anyone else ever has — far better, for instance, than Pamela Sargent did in *The Shore of Women* (another book I enjoyed). I would recommend this book to anyone (except, I guess, Mr. Schweitzer) and feel confident that they would find it as strong and interesting as I did. Further, how could Mr. Schweitzer admit to not

finishing the book, and still give it a two star rating ("Fair," according to the guide)? Hardly fair at all, is it? Like life.

Pear. While I'm in the mood for some Darrell-bashing, I might as well pick on his "Maybe Janice will want to review this one in detail" statement. The comment is so blatantly sexist that it emphasizes just how important I think it would be for him to give Ms. Tepper's book another try. The implication is that only another woman would be able to appreciate what Ms. Tepper is trying to communicate — a sad commentary on not only Mr. Schweitzer's opinion of female writers, but of women in general. *The Gate To Women's Country* has a very important message for the entire human race, not just women. "Arggh" yourself, Darrell.

Grape. The picture of Wendy Snow-Lang is fascinating.

Peach. This time I waited until I finished the whole issue before writing. All of the fiction is, as usual, excellent, but I especially like Gerald Perkins' "The Runner, the Walker, and the One Who Danced After." I think Byron Taylor's art for this story is as good as any you've ever published. Are either of these prints available from The Art Gallery? (Not yet. — Ed.) If so, you can probably expect to get more of my hard-earned money.

A special anthology

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ABORIGINAL SCIENCE FICTION

Tales of the Human Kind

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Stories by:

Orson Scott Card

Frederik Pohl

Ian Watson

and 9 others ...

Aboriginal Science Fiction was nominated for a Hugo award for its first full year of publication. During that first year, the magazine was not printed on slick paper, even though it did use full-color art.

Now is your chance to see some of the best stories and art from *Aboriginal's* first seven issues — the issues for which it has been nominated for the Hugo. We have published a special 80-page full-color, full-size, full-slick collection of stories and art from those early issues — the issues which were originally not published on slick paper.

The anthology is 8½ by 11 inches in size and contains 12 stories along with 19 pages of full-color art. It has 80 pages chock full of great entertainment.

The special anthology includes the following stories:

"Search and Destroy" by Frederik Pohl
"Prior Restraint" by Orson Scott Card
"The Milk of Knowledge" by Ian Watson
"Sing" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch
"Merchant Dying" by Paul A. Gilster
"It Came From the Slushpile" by Bruce Bethke
"An Unfiltered Man" by Robert A. Metzger
"Containment" by Dean Whitlock
"Passing" by Elaine Radford
"What Brothers Are For" by Patricia Anthony
"The Last Meeting at Olduvai" by Steven R. Boyett
"Regeneration" by Rory Harper

The special anthology, bound to be a collector's item, retails for \$4.50 at your nearest Waldenbooks or favorite bookstore. If they don't have it, tell them they can order it from Ingram Periodicals, Tel. 1-(800)-759-5000. Or, if you prefer, you can order it direct from us for \$4.50 plus \$1.00 postage and handling. Send your check or money order for \$5.50 to: *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, P.O. Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888.

Pomegranate. Keep up the good work, Charlie. It's getting better all the time and one of these years you'll be able to change the word "nominee" on the cover to "winner."

Yours in hunger (due to my sesquiquennial diet),

Richard Hauptmann
Clovis, NM

Dear Mr. Ryan and ASF staff,

I am a full-time student, about to, hopefully, enter the UC system on a program of literary studies. I have yet to discover a literary genre that better describes the hopes and fears of mankind than fantasy and science fiction (the "good stuff," at least). I'm a subscriber to a number of fine magazines, among them *Omni*, *IASFM*, and for a touch of horror, *The Twilight Zone* — but none do I look forward to with more enthusiasm than *Aboriginal Science Fiction*. The stories and art work are great — and I really like the "Boomerang" feedback. Normally, magazine forums are boring — but the writers to ASF are especially bright and entertaining.

Your magazine has been a source of inspiration to me in the few months I have known about it. As a writer and someone interested in someday publishing myself — a success story is always a morale boost.

Which of course brings me to the inevitable request for a copy of your story guidelines. (Enclosed SASE.) A magazine that encourages tomorrow's writers is doing a great service to the future — and that's what SF is about.

The book reviews of Ms. Eisen and Mr. Schweitzer, are, in my opinion, among the best in the field. Although I don't always agree with their dislikes, I have never been disappointed in following one of their positive leads. I work nights as well as attending college and my pleasure reading time is too precious to me to waste on trash.

Also, please don't change the name of your magazine. I hate to see intelligent people cater to the degradation of perfectly good descriptive terms (so apt in your case), and allow childish bigotry to turn them into social slurs.

Thanks for the good reading, and keep up the good work.

Sincerely,
Scott D. Feldman
Simi Valley, CA

Dear GentlePersons,

When I ordered your mag for myself and my son-in-law I had no idea I would enjoy your publication so much. In fact I have never written to anyone before and have been subscribing to the other Big "A" since it started. The artwork has been everything your ad promised and more. You can't know what this means to a woman whose children range in age from 25 years to 19 months.

I am enclosing a check for 10 dollars to cover the cost of getting 2 copies of your anthology and postage. I hope you can send them to me. There's a lot of people out West here who need a chance to experience just what you have to offer.

Again thank you so much. I am
Kealani Davis
Port Orchard, WA

Dear Sir:

Just received the March/April, 1989 issue and after reading the various comments from your readers about the name of the magazine, would like to add my own comment.

I am a native Australian of English/Irish extraction. I was rather surprised to read that the term "Abo" was considered a derogatory one "down under." This is not my own recollection. To me, and to people I knew, it was merely a convenient diminutive for "Aboriginal," (a five-syllable mouthful), similar, in fact, to our use of "Aussie" to describe ourselves instead of the full four-syllable "Australian."

Since it is over thirty-five years since I came to America it is possible that some derogatory connotation has crept in as regards "Abo." Let's hope the same thing doesn't happen to "Aussie" also. (It won't if they all carry those big knives *Crocodile Dundee* waves about. — Ed.) I've always been rather proud to hear my American friends refer to me as their "Aussie" friend.

It's true the Australian Aborigines (back in seventeen-something-or-other) were found to be extremely primitive. They had lived in isolation from the rest of the world for a very long time. However, you might be interested to know that in the classification of the major races of the world the Australian Aboriginal occupies a unique place; he is classified as an "Archaic Caucasian." Australia is a very ancient land, and in addition to our unique "Abos" we can claim other unique life forms, such as the platypus, the kangaroo, koala, etc.

Please continue to call yourself *Aboriginal Science Fiction*. It was the name that hooked me in the first place.

Sincerely,
Betty Hansen
Hudson, NY

Dear Mr. Ryan:

I enjoy Robert Metzger's stories in general and liked "In the Shadow of Bones" in particular. A sequel to "In the Shadow of Bones" suggests itself, in which thousands of sentient races vie for the privilege of helping out new survivors of racial near-annihilation. Fierce competition among the already-saved to reduce their mountains of bones escalates into warfare. Finally they begin wiping each other out. At this point, super-sentients step in. With

a sorrow born of wisdom, they bring an end to the violence by enforcing a ban on chain-boning.

I'd also like to offer an opinion counter to ex-subscriber Martha Hutchinson's negative one. Darrell Schweitzer's column is the first thing I turn to when my new *Aboriginal SF* arrives, and that's saying a lot. I find his opinions informed and intelligent, and his writing style entertaining (not a bit pompous or know-it-all-ish). So, you know what the French say...

Regards,
Carol R. Morrison
Acton, MA

Dear Charlie,

I suppose I should answer a couple of outraged readers:

Richard Hauptmann raises an objection I take seriously. I think he's finding a male chauvinist under every bush. My objection to *The Gate to Women's Country* has nothing to do with gender or ideology, but merely the fact that I found the book tedious, over-wrought, and ill-written.

I do not doubt Sheri Tepper's sincerity, or that she was trying to write a genuinely important book. But, if you're going to write a book that'll stand with *The Dispossessed*, then you have to write as well as Le Guin. She didn't. It's an extreme case of reach exceeding grasp.

I commended the book to Janice's attention not out of any arrogant assumption that junk like this needs to be relegated to a mere woman, but simply because, if she finds it more readable than I did, she may be able to weigh the content of the novel more carefully than I did. I frankly never got that far.

Martin Morse Wooster points out to me (in issue No. 15) that I've made a factual error in my discussion of John Campbell's last years. There is another late Campbell-era Hugo winner of course, Anne McCaffrey's novella "Weyr Search," which tied with Phillip Jose Farmer's "Riders of the Purple Wage" for best of 1967. That a novella isn't "short fiction" is splitting hairs.

There are three Hugo-winners from the last decade or so of the Campbell *Analogue*: "The Longest Voyage" by Poul Anderson (Dec. 1960), "Weyr Search" by McCaffrey (October 1967) and, of course, Frank Herbert's *Dune* (Dec. 1963-Feb. 1964; Jan-May 1965). This is not an impressive showing from a magazine which paid the highest rates and sold more copies than any of its rivals. *Analogue* should have been the leader in the 1960s, but the action was clearly elsewhere.

So, my basic premise stands, but facts are still facts.

Cheers,
Darrell Schweitzer
Stratford, PA

Dear Sirs,

Please send me a copy of your writer's guidelines (SASE enclosed).

I regret not having the funds to resubscribe to your fine magazine. However, as much as I enjoyed my subscription I do have two complaints.

Breaking up the stories (putting a page of ads in the middle of a story is fine, having to jump from page 8 to page 53 to finish a story annoys me) and putting the cover art of one book in the review columns in the text of a review for a different book.

Other than that I have a high regard for the quality of the stories you choose to print.

Thank you.

Richard L. Parker
Colorado Springs, CO

Dear ASF,

First, allow me to congratulate you on your fine magazine. Your writers and artists continually blow me away. But I would like to take issue, if I might, with Mr. Brin.

It's gratifying to read the provocative words of a thinker, of one who is in touch with the past. But in exploring the dichotomy of myth and reason, the war between the romantics and the Enlightenment, let us not forget to make room for people of faith who have felt respect for the integrity of reason and its requirements. I'm not one to make a partisan pitch for any one particular religion, but if faith be allowed to exist, it's possible that, subject to the requirements of reason, it can go beyond reason without contradicting it at all. Now whether this makes me a Catholic or a Muslim or whatever, depends on subjective judgment which may or may not be unbiased in the face of a potential objective reality. I say "potential" because objective reality can be denied (and all the more easily if it involves faith.)

Science likes to be coldly empirical, but even this can lead it to admit through deduction the existence of intelligent infinity if it's going to take an in-depth look at messy things like primary causes. Does science frighten the man of faith? Not at all if he sees no contradiction between faith and reason. Can there be no compromise between the two views of time and wisdom? Not if the predominating "look forward" is unable to touch a wisdom and a lore which is timeless.

Are we really all that transformed a people? There's evidence that Washington was a fan of the Roman stories. Democracy, perhaps the best system suited to our day and age, had never been tried before, nor tolerance (most Roman officials didn't like the anti-Christian laws anyway). There were those among the fathers of our country who had their bubbles burst first when the immediate maturation of the Enlightenment didn't come about.

Even dear old Ben (my hero) stopped being antagonistic towards religion as he got older. Don't get me wrong; I don't have a bone to pick with evolution (no pun intended) as long as it doesn't maintain that a lower cause produces a greater effect. But it's still possible that human nature is what it is, what it always was, and what it always will be even if humanity does end up fighting wars on Beta Camis VII or something.

I'm anxious to see how Mr. Brin will go about unifying the opposing views, but let's remember that it's not all that black and white.

Respectfully,

Neo-Aristotelian Jim Garner
Hampton, CT

Dear Mr. Ryan:

In the editorial of your latest issue, you went on the soapbox again about what is, and is not SF. (Again? — Ed.) When you rejected my last story, which happened to be about Santa Claus and the problems he'd be facing being hundreds of years old by now, you hand-scrawled a note saying "Santa is fantasy, not SF." Since the word "Santa" appeared in the title, I wasn't sure

(Continued to page 62)

A Long Time Ago ...

Before taking charge at *Aboriginal Science Fiction*, our editor, Charles C. Ryan, was the editor of *Galileo*, a science fiction magazine published in the mid-1970s. During his tenure there, he helped discover a number of new writers who have since gone on to win Nebula and/or Hugo awards, writers such as Connie Willis, John Kessel, Lewis Shiner and more.

Now, on his behalf, we'd like to give you an opportunity to see some of the best stories he collected a decade ago.

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The District Domino Championship

By Kir Bulychev

(Translated by John H. Costello)

Art by Larry Blamire

The tiny candlelights flickered their way through the air down the dusty street, until they reached the enormous lime tree at the entrance to the park and then scattered without a trace. The wind was hot, the weather bureau hinting that it had come out of Africa in the form of a hurricane.

Kornely Udalov hurried aside from the lights, pressing himself to the clapboard construction wall. Sasha Grubin ploughed straight ahead through the lights, brushing them away from him.

"I'm afraid," Udalov said, "Goriukhin will let us down. You can only take so many punches and still stay on your feet."

"It's all wasted," Grubin said. "I'm certain."

The loudspeaker over his head was describing the large losses both sides of the Klubian-Varian war were sustaining. The war had reached a perilous stage.

"We mustn't fall on our faces," Udalov said. He was visibly agitated. He took off his cloth hat and wiped his bald spot. "Twelve teams, the best talents in the district. What'll they think about the organizers?"

"It's all wasted," Grubin answered.

They entered the park; immediately it became damper and the wind died away. From ahead came the sound of muffled blows. The line of trees wound along the shore of the river for a short distance. Acid fumes, the wastes carried here from the factories and plants upriver, steamed from the water.

A steam hammer was working in the field outside the dance grounds. Before it, wooden tar-covered piles about six meters long lay on the ground. Some of them were already beaten into the ground so that scarcely a meter protruded as supports for the tables. The boards were to be two inches thick, with a steel sheet on top.

On the dance team's field a local artist had made a placard: "Greetings to the participants in the regional domino championships!" in letters more than a meter high. The placard was to hang in the main square.

It began to snow, and immediately grew cold. Evidently the African cyclone had been replaced by one

from Norway. The weather had been like that for the last week.

"If the climactic conditions are going to be this unpleasant, we'll have to look into the back-up plan," Grubin said and pensively ran his fingers through his violently rumpled hair.

They approached the stands that the carpenters were hammering together.

"Can we get an awning hung?" Udalov asked.

"The appropriation won't cover it," Grubin commented.

"What if there's a popular subscription?"

"There have been two already; people are tired of them. And there's no time left before tomorrow."

"We'll get around it," Udalov said then. "We always get around it."

Enormous snowflakes were dropping down to the grass on the ground. One of the whirling dust devils, its strange form cutting through the wall of trees, jumped onto the field and overturned the plywood sheet with the slogan, dispersing the artist and the on-lookers. The artist swore.

"Get a grip on yourself, man!" Udalov advised him. He and Grubin, leaning forward so as not to be carried off by the wind, hurried onward to the summer reading room where the teams and the fans who had made it to town were waiting. They all sat behind the little tables. Udalov went forward and turned to them.

Here they all were, comrades in arms, tempered fighters with calloused palms and sharp, knowing looks; men able to count to a hundred and beyond; experts on openings and endspiels, well-known masters of the draw.

"The tables will be ready on time," Udalov announced.

It grew dark beyond the windows. The blizzard moved in on them. Snow, thick with small stones the winds had picked up in the Kizyl-kum desert, hammered against the windows.

The lights didn't come on; the wires were down. The glass tolled and shattered. No one left the hall.

"The entrance forms of twenty teams have been received," Udalov shouted, cutting through the rum-



ble of the storm. "The majority of them are not dangerous, but we cannot dismiss the fighting ability of Drakonov and Zmiev from Potma."

The fans' raspberries cut through the whistle of the wind.

"But both our teams," Udalov continued, "Grubin and me (applause) and Loshkin and Pogosian (thunderous applause) are prepared and not afraid (the rumble of applause)."

... They returned homeward under a drenching rain. It was warm. Frogs were falling at an angle from the sky. The barometer that had hung in the market square for a hundred years lay in the dirt; it had dropped so low it had fallen from its pillar.

"Nature is doing her best to interfere," Grubin said.

"We'll ignore nature," Udalov said. "Nothing is going to stop us. It's dangerous to forget the big picture for the sake of mere details."

When Udalov reached home he found a sour mood reigning. It was the TV's fault. It had been announced that the retreating Klubian armies had struck at the Varian capital with an atomic weapon. There were numerous casualties. The radioactive cloud was spreading in the direction of Europe.

Udalov felt truly sorry for the Varians, but the main problem was that the municipal authorities would put aside scarcely thirty rooms in the Goose Hotel; two double bedrooms, the remainder could house four each. They could get a few more folding cots, but there would still not be enough for all the fans who were coming in from Gluboky Yar, from Muraviev, from Mateika

The pensioner Loshkin came by; he didn't feel well. The air pressure was hurting him. Udalov explained to him that, at this moment in history, it was positively criminal to think about mere health. The old man shot back, referring to the news in the newspaper that the ozone layer in the ionosphere over Antarctica had been completely lost and that cosmic rays were reaching the earth unhindered, destroying the flora and the fauna. Udalov explained reasonably that responsible international organizations were dealing with the ionosphere.

"We have other problems. For the first time in all its history the town of Great Gusliar's municipal team smells a chance of becoming district champions." Loshkin was wounded and went off by himself to take some validol.

It happens that fate itself may conspire against an idea. This gets mentioned every now and then in the biographies of famous people. But the strength of a soul consists of its being able to draw sharp boundaries between the important and the unimportant, the fundamentals and the trifles.

The bicyclist from Gluboky Yar who knocked on Udalov's door at ten o'clock at night was sodden and scarcely alive, and carried the news that Korovka Brook, overflowing with industrial wastes, had begun to flood the town, cutting it off from civilization. The departure of Gluboky Yar's team was in doubt; the

team had retreated to the roof of the clubhouse and was holding the boxes filled with their precious playing tiles over their heads. Udalov promised to send a tugboat to Gluboky Yar in the morning. The bicyclist, his hope renewed, wheeled off into the night. He was just one of the breed of modest heroes.

Udalov couldn't sleep. A muffled mutter came from the receiver on the table; Udalov had not turned it off, in the hope the radio would carry news about the championships. The radio spoke of snow drifts in Hawaii and sessions of the Security Council. There was no more news from the Klubian-Varian front, but satellites had caught a series of nuclear flashes. At the end of the news the weather announcer asked the forgiveness of his listeners, explaining that it was impossible to predict tomorrow's weather. About the district domino championships there was not a word.

The earthquake began around 3:00 AM. It wasn't strong but it lasted a long time. At 7:00 AM Udalov set off across the city to Siniushin's. Dominoes had been played here as far back as the era of the First Five-Year Plan, and that was where they had hidden the more expensive hors d'oeuvres and wines for the opening.

Udalov reckoned that now, in this decisive moment in Great Gusliar's history, the old man would at least come to meet him.

Udalov made it to his destination after more than an hour; during the night sand dunes had formed in some areas of town and snowdrifts in others. Although the day hadn't really begun, he could see that the trees stood naked, surrounded by mounds of leaves.

Siniushin didn't open the door for the longest time; he had sat it out in the basement. He was wrapped in a blanket, on top of which was a poncho sewn from plastic bags. Udalov reminded him why he had come.

"Will the evacuation be soon?" the old man asked.

"We'll talk about that later," Udalov said.

"Where are the secret domino moves for the opening? Without them we will never overcome Zmiev and Drakonov."

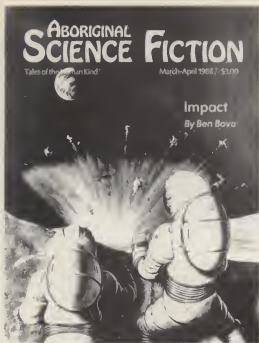
The old man didn't understand. He wanted to find out about the nuclear winter. Udalov barely kept a grip on himself. The important thing was not to get the old man angry. In the end he won. Getting back home with the precious notes took two hours, because many trees and telephone poles had fallen. He had to pick his way around a bus the wind had overturned. The radioactive sky glowed green.

Udalov was worried about whether the people from Mateika would make it; the road there would be a sea of mud. Should he send a tractor to get them?

While Udalov was getting into his best suit and searching for his necktie, Grubin came up the stairs. Grubin was spotless. He'd sewn "Grubin #2" and "Great Gusliar" on the back of his jacket.

Grubin notified Udalov that Loshkin felt ill, but was ready for battle. The two of them laid Loshkin out on a folding cot and lifted. Loshkin clutched Siniushin's hors d'oeuvres to his chest.

A mountain had risen in the market square. The ground ripped apart and shuddered. They had to carry



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— Connie Willis

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Loshkin across a bottomless trench.

The orchestra was already forming up outside the park; only the violinist and the kettledrum were left. They walked onward, supporting each other. It had become quite dark and meteorites were falling out of the sky. The situation was exhilarating. They wanted to sing and laugh. Getting around in the park was difficult because most of the trees had already fallen. They threw away the folding cot; supported by his comrades, lifted by the spirit of the moment, Loshkin dragged himself along.

On the field they were met by Pogosian, an enormous person, Loshkin's teammate.

"Report..." Udalov began.

"The fans are digging out the tables," Pogosian said. "It's good the orchestra made it."

By then all that remained of the orchestra was the kettledrum; the violinist was lost in the mass of fallen trees.

"Drakonov make it?" Udalov asked.

"Zmiev too," Pogosian nodded. "But Zmiev's got a broken hand."

"Not his right, I hope."

"No, the left. Everything's in order. What's the news from town?"

"The city lives in expectation of our victory in the match," Udalov answered.

The storm died down. A scarlet sun looked out from between the clouds. Nature had transformed its soul. The fans (they numbered more than a dozen) had already dug down through the snow and the dirt of the trench to the tables. In the end only one table was needed, it turned out; the teams from Mateika and Gluboky Yar couldn't make it.

The teams were seated: Loshkin versus Pogosian, Drakonov versus Zmiev. Zmiev had his left hand in splints; he was grimacing from the pain, but fire burned in his eyes. Drakonov, as always, was gloomy but sure of himself. Udalov judged the first round; Grubin assisted him.

The scarlet sun looked down.

The throw turned out successful for Loshkin; he beat his way around the table first.

The Greenland ice shield slipped to the south, and the Atlantic Ocean gushed onto the land. The moon left its orbit and headed out into deep space.

Pogosian had to forfeit his move. Drakonov knocked his way around the table by a double of three so hard that the six-meter pile moved ten centimeters in the ground. A fan from Mateika shouted "Hurrah!"

A thick green cloud occluded this scene. The play was coming to an end, but the result of it all was still unclear.

Unfortunately, a small volcano, which had risen right in the middle of the district park, unexpectedly erupted. The pile of wood, players, and judges flew off in different directions. Udalov regained consciousness on the shore of a sea — the Atlantic Ocean had broken through to Great Guslar.

Udalov helped Drakonov get to his feet. They staggered away from the sea, trying not to fall into the lava flow from the volcano.

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"We'll finish the match tomorrow," laughed Udalov.

"I remember the layout," Drakonov said. "I'll

write it all down."

And they crawled off in search of the others. □

Of Archetypes and Arcologies

By Bruce Boston

*In the walled city,
the tiered and domed city
we never deign to leave,
in the hermetic metropolises
of our dreams and ideation,
there are a thousand faces
to choose and choose again
from a changing pantheon
of instant adulation.*

*Vivid light and flesh are
'he terms of our heroines:
the spermatozoa of heroes
are frozen by the million,
the multicloned gametes
of goddesses preserved,
so those of us who hunger
can impersonate celebrity
in our own procreation.*

*As the city mines each myth,
as the fashions cycle past
in a boomerang progression,
as the streaming photons
light our darkened habitats
and curl our perfect cheeks
with a ghost illumination,
we embrace the endless tales
of our holograph fixation.*

*In the shadowed and deserted
reaches of our hemisphere
moisture gathers, an oily rain
descends, yet nothing sprouts
from this tepid condensation;
while beyond the sealed dome,
far across the shattered plain,
ancient scanners long embedded
send back a dim reflection.*

*Our arcology resembles
a decapitated head resting
upright on its severed neck,
fault lines lace its skull
like a nesting spider's web,
and we are fading neurons
of a failing cogitation,
attendants to illusion
and its inbred deifications.* □

Boomerangs

(Continued from page 55)

whether you were referring to the story itself, or the tales about winter wonderland in general. (Both. — Ed.)

Out of curiosity, I'm asking whether the view you hold about SF vs. Fantasy is just your personal opinion, one which naturally would be extended to your magazine guidelines, or if you have made arbitrary judgments on where to draw the line in fiction. In one sense, all fiction is fantasy, and science fiction would therefore have to be considered fantasy as well.

Perhaps the word fantasy itself is causing some confusion (with myself, and other readers/writers). When you capitalize the F, however, it seems you're venturing into the realm of sword & sorcery. For example, there were no swords or witches in my story "Santa Helper." There were elves, but they came from a different planet. They used fluorescent lighting, because it more resembled that of their own star. I did not include these pieces of information in the story to make it more plausible for an SF magazine; it seemed only logical, since I do not personally know of elves running around on Earth, that were they to be found, they probably would be aliens.

I remember reading a short story by Harry Harrison, the title of which, alas, I cannot recall. It, however had something to do with Santa Claus on a planet whose ancestors came from China. He would come to the top of the environmentally-enclosed, condominium-style habitat, flying in with his anti-grav sleigh, slip down into the building and leave again. Sorry, but I can't remember any of the details of the story, but in my mind, at least it was definitely SF.

It's things like the above, that make me wonder where you're judging the line to be, between Fantasy and SF. See, you almost seemed to contradict yourself in the editorial. At first, you went on about how you wouldn't publish the latter, but at the end you were talking about a new Larry Niven story to be out in the next issue. Is it, then, that the name of the author carries weight over the quality of the story? I certainly hope not, not just because I don't have a huge name, but because ultimately it is an unsound practice, in my opinion. Eventually, by censoring yourself in this fashion, you'll miss out on a good story, because it won't have a "good" author behind it.

Oh, this letter (which is technically a cover for "Gobble Guy") is not specifically for your reader's column,

but if you want to cut it up and put it in, feel free.

Thank you,
Carl Pearson
Houston, TX

(Three points: 1. We buy what we consider to be good stories regardless of who writes them. 2. As much as I enjoy stories about him, Santa is a myth and qualifies as fantasy unless the author converts the fantasy into science fiction and we like the story. It is possible we may publish a Santa Claus story some day. 3. The categories of SF, as I tried to explain, are arbitrary and in this case based on an analysis of science content, convention, or function. Of course, all fiction is fantasy. As Heinlein pointed out, science fiction is a subset of (fantasy) fiction, which generally considers "what if" projections of current or possible scientific theory into the future (or past). And, as I said, a good writer has the ability to bend the rules, because a good writer knows the rules. Larry Niven does so in his "magic" stories. Whether you want to call them fantasy or alternate world SF is up to you. — Ed.)

Dear Charlie:

The March-April 1989 issue of *Aboriginal* was awesome! I subscribed with the sixth issue (give or take) of *ASF* and quickly ordered all previous copies. Now, like most of *ASF*'s readers, I avidly await each coming issue. Your "special issue full of Aliens" was special in another way: it set a high water mark for the magazine in every respect — the stories, poetry, artwork, etc. How do you do it? Someday I hope my writing may appear in your pages because I would like to see how Pat Morrissey, Courtney Skinner, or Byron Taylor would illustrate it. I just sent off my response to the nineteenth annual *Locus* reader survey and was surprised by how many of my favorite stories of 1988 came from *ASF*. When will you start publishing monthly? (I don't know, have you got a million bucks you want to invest? — Ed.)

Sincerely yours,
Jeremiah Patrick Reilly
Philadelphia, PA

To the Editor, Publisher, Circulation staff & assorted others;

For 30-plus years, various magazine and newspaper articles, as well as books, have prompted me to tell myself that I must respond by writing somewhere. Never in that time have I gotten around to actually sitting down and doing that writing.

You are the cause of breaking that long-standing tradition! Now I have finally sat down and written (keyed) that

very first response. I have come to thoroughly enjoy your magazine — that's not hard — I have very eclectic tastes in science fiction. But rarely has a story moved me as strongly as "Good Neighbor" by Patricia Anthony in the Sept/Oct 1988 issue. Strongly reminiscent of the Simak classic "Way Station," but unique in its own right, "Good Neighbor" reminds us of all that we can be (and usually choose not to be). After properly digesting the story for a few days, I told myself I must

write — but put it off as usual.

Just about the time that itch to write had passed, along came the Mar/Apr 89 issue and Gerald Perkins' glorious love story "The Runner, the Walker, and the One Who Danced After." Two movers that close together and my long-standing tradition has been cast aside.

Now that I have begun this letter I can throw in a few other items as well. The illustrations are special. Unlike too many illustrations in other SF maga-

zines, these actually add to the enjoyment rather than causing frustration while one attempts to divine how the illustrations fit the story. And more, the illustrations most usually qualify as art as opposed to mere graphics. The regular features are always enjoyable and the reviews are reviews — not a dissertation on the reviewers' tastes. I have used the reviews to make buy/not buy decisions on several occasions now and have not been misled.

Finally, your unique renewal policy had me determined to send a renewal letter and then came your "sweepstakes" mailer. Completely hooked, this letter is being composed in less than 72 hours after the mailer arrived! Enclosed is your completed mailer — put my name in the pot (twice!), my check for renewal and an order for a whole batch of items I have been meaning to write and order since I began reading your publications.

The Hugo nomination was more than well-deserved! Thank you for the pleasure you have given me and will give me in the future. "Keep on keepin' on." And, by all that is holy or unholy, ignore the small, ignorant minds that find some problem with the title of your masterpiece. Only the weakest excuses for intelligence will accept their carping and you do not need their readership.

Sincerely,
Jim Jones
Seattle, WA

Dear *Aboriginal SF*,

I am writing this letter in order to get your writer's guidelines, so please send me it in the S.A.S.E. that I provided with this letter.

I would like to use this opportunity to point out a few things to you worth noting. I believe that your Readers' Comment section is too long, instead of it you can add another short story. I also think that the *Aborigines* section by Laurel Lucas should be abolished. I am sure that most of your readers simply skim through this section without reading it fully.

Don't misunderstand me from my two comments stated above, I still think that basically your magazine is interesting and entertaining, and I sincerely congratulate you on it.

Sincerely yours,
Shaul Broymann
Brooklyn, NY

P.S. Please publish as many stories by Robert A. Metzger as possible, his stories are great.

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